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## FRANK READE, JR., And His Queen Clipper of the Clouds.

PART I.

By "NONAME."



The fugitive settler needed no injunction to make haste. His wife and children were in the wagon, and the honest pioneer was seeking to save the loved ones, who were dearer to him than his own life.



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# FRANK READE, JR.,

## AND HIS

### QUEEN CLIPPER OF THE CLOUDS.

A THRILLING STORY OF A WONDERFUL VOYAGE IN THE AIR.

## PART I.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr., and His Electric Team," "Frank Reade, Jr.'s Chase Through the Clouds," etc., etc.

### CHAPTER I.

FRANK READE, JR., AND DR. VANEYKE.

"WHY, how are you, Frank, my boy? Just getting back from New York, I conclude?"

The speaker was Dr. Vaneyke, a man of over middle age and a celebrated scientist and famous traveler.

He had just entered the smoking-car of a western-bound railway train at a way station, and the young man to whom he spoke, and with whom he at the same time shook hands warmly, was Frank Reade, Jr.

Though Frank Reade, Jr., had the best years of his life yet before him, he had already achieved fame as an inventor, and, indeed, many of his inventions had surpassed anything the world had previously known.

"Yes, doctor," answered the young man, in response to the greeting of the other, who was his most valued friend, "I am just returning from New York. But sit down here and have a smoke."

"Thanks," replied the doctor, taking a seat at his friend's side and accepting a fragrant "havana."

"All well at home in Readestown, I suppose?" asked Frank, Jr.

"Yes. That is to say your family is well. But as to the town—well, a large band of tramps have camped in the grove beyond the village, and I shouldn't wonder if we had some trouble with them yet, as they are bold and insolent, and, as I suspect, given to thieving."

"They are not pleasant neighbors to have, at all events, and they haven't located far from my residence. I think I shall apply to the county authorities to remove them."

"I think myself it would be a wise plan to do so, for I understand that, because your servants have refused to rob your larder to supply their exorbitant demands for provisions, they have made some ugly threats. But by the way, Frank, did you make the final purchases of material, machinery and supplies for the great air-ship you are building?"

"Yes, doctor, and everything further needed for the completion of my last, and by all odds the greatest invention of my life, is to be shipped by rail to Readestown without delay."

Besides Frank Reade, Jr., and Dr. Vaneyke there were only three other men in the smoker. Two of these were commercial travelers, and they were seated in the forward part of the car talking and laughing loudly. The third man, aside from Frank Reade, Jr., and the doctor, was a personage regarding whom little can be said, for his face was not to be seen.

He occupied the seat directly ahead of Frank and the doctor, and he appeared to be sleeping soundly, with his face resting upon his arms, that were supported by the back of the seat in front.

Dr. Vaneyke resided at Readestown, which was also Frank Reade, Jr.'s, home, and the two had already engaged in many discussions about the last new invention which Frank was at work on.

The doctor was almost as much interested in this wonderful air-ship as the young inventor himself. But they could not agree as to the theory, which, carried out practically, would result in an apparatus by means of which the air might be successfully navigated.

The doctor, as well as Frank Reade, Jr., had been a student of aerostatics—that which pertains to navigating the air.

"Frank," said the old scientist presently, when he had got his cigar well under way, "I am still skeptical. I am very much afraid this last invention of yours will turn out a failure."

"Impossible! I tell you, doctor, I feel that my success is assured," said Frank enthusiastically.

"The greatest inventors have failed to solve the problem of making a guidable balloon, Frank. True, in large, covered halls they have been made to go in a medium heavier than themselves, but they were found useless outside. A good breeze baffled them. A storm would have wrecked them."

"Very good," replied Frank Reade, Jr., not at all shaken in his conviction of the ultimate success of his invention. "If the apparatus for sailing in the atmosphere finds support in the air, it belongs to the medium in which it moves. Under such conditions how can its mass, which offers so much resistance to the atmosphere, make its way against the wind?"

The doctor looked at Frank, Jr., keenly as he said:

"Do you then mean to suggest the absurd theory that the flying machine to succeed must be heavier than the air? Why, all the great authorities are against you."

"That is precisely why they have failed. I assert, doctor, that the future of the flying machine depends on its being heavier than the air. The air affords a solid fulcrum. If a column of air has an ascensional movement of forty-five meters a second a man can support himself on the top of it by the surface of the soles of his boots. If you, by means of a screw, drive a mass of air at this speed, you get the same results. I discard the balloon utterly. The bird flies. He is not a balloon. He is a piece of mechanism! Nature, to a certain extent, becomes my guide," said Frank Reade, Jr.

"I know your theory sounds well enough. But what has been the fate of those who have attempted to sail the air in flying machines?" replied the doctor.

"If they have failed it was not because my theory is wrong. No. It was because the fault was in its application—in the construction of the apparatus," rejoined Frank, Jr.

"And have you overcome all the errors of your predecessors?"

"I flatter myself that I have done so. I now have all the plans and drawings for my air-ship completed, and I shall immediately hurry forward the construction of the apparatus."

The doctor and Frank Reade, Jr., had no thought that any one was listening to their conversation,

for they supposed the man in front of them was really sleeping soundly.

Such, however, was not the actual truth; the man with his head bowed was not asleep. Far from it. In fact, he was never more wide awake in his life. His eyes flashed with a cunning light, his pale features worked nervously, and he drank in every word uttered by Frank Reade, Jr., and the old doctor as though his life depended on it.

"When De Lacy showed that the stag beetle could lift into the air two hundred times its own weight the problem of the flying-machine was nearly solved. Whence came the power? From the beating of the air," continued Frank, Jr.

"It is true, the air is highly resistant."

"And we know that as the weight of a bird increases the less is the proportional increase of the surface beaten by its wings in order to sustain it."

"But the motion is slower."

"Precisely; and so I know the application of this principle to my flying machine is perfectly practical."

"I am not yet convinced, Frank. However, I wish you all success. And if you do succeed the achievement will astound the world."

"I agree with you, doctor, and now I want you to promise me one thing."

"What is that?"

"If, when my air-ship is completed you are convinced that my object is attained, will you accompany me on a voyage in the air?"

"Yes, I pledge you my word. What, to sail above the globe like a ship upon the sea! Ah, it would be glorious—glorious beyond compare!"

"Then you shall have the experience."

"But, Frank, how will you get your motive power?"

"From electricity."

"Then you will employ a powerful electro-motor?"

"No. On the contrary, I shall employ no motor!"

The man with his head down started violently, but the young inventor and the doctor did not observe his movement.

"No motor! Are you in your right mind, Frank?"

"Rather. But the explanation of my meaning would involve a long discussion. You will know all later on."

"Of what is your flying machine to be constructed? Of wood?"

"No," replied Frank.

"Of metal?"

"No."

The doctor looked puzzled, but not as much so as the man whose face was hidden, and who pretended to be asleep.

Frank laughed.

"Really, doctor, you must wait until my air-ship is built. Then will be the time for me to make everything clear," said he.

Just then the train began to slow up, and the brakeman opened the door and shouted:



"Readestown!" and presently the train drew up at the station.

Frank, Jr., and Dr. Vandyke left the train, and when it steamed on again the man who occupied the seat just ahead of the one they had vacated sat up.

Then he could be seen to be a man past middle age. His face was pale, his eyes were strangely brilliant, and his intellectual features stamped him as a student. His hair was long and rather unkempt. He was clothed in a suit of black broadcloth, which had seen long service, and on his head he wore a silk hat rather the worse for wear.

It seemed that the conversation he had overheard had induced a state of mental excitation which the strange-looking man found it difficult to repress, for he muttered in low tones to himself for some time, while his features worked and his brilliant eyes snapped fire.

Finally, however, he became calm, and, taking up his hand-bag, he opened it and found a copy of a scientific journal, which he proceeded to read.

The hand-bag was marked, evidently with his own name, thus:

"PROFESSOR LEONIDAS WICKERSHAM."

Frank Reade, Jr., meanwhile walked homeward, accompanied by the good doctor.

The young inventor owned a fine residence in the suburbs of the town, which had been named in honor of his father, who now resided with Frank, Jr.

Frank, Jr., was married, and his wife was a most lovely and devoted woman. It would not be easy to find a happier home than that of Frank Reade, Jr. Besides the immediate kindred who made his hearthstone the abiding-place of kindly feelings and home pleasures, there were two old servants who lived in cottages of their own nearby, who were as devoted to Frank, Jr., as they had been in other days to his father.

These servants were respectively Barney O'Shea, a jolly Irishman, and Pomp, "a colored gentleman," as he delighted to call himself.

Barney and Pomp were at heart the best friends in the world, and each would willingly risk his life for the other, and had often done so. But, for all that, they were forever playing practical jokes on each other, and quarreling and fighting between themselves.

Barney was never as happy as when in a row, and if no one else was at hand to afford him "a bit of diversion" he was sure to get up a "ruction" with Pomp.

Pomp was a dead shot with the rifle, and a smart dandy in every way. The Irishman seldom got much ahead of him.

Barney and Pomp led happy lives. Each was married and well-to-do. Still they were always working around Frank's place when there was anything to do.

Both had accompanied the young inventor and his father on many strange voyages and journeys in remarkable conveyances which they had invented.

The Irishman and the dandy both delighted in travel and adventure, and they were always ready to go anywhere, in any way, with Frank, Jr.

Now, as Frank Reade, Jr., and Dr. Vandyke approached the former's residence, Pomp could be seen at work pruning a tree on the lawn. He had just completed cutting the grass there, and he had raked up the hay and made it into a neat stack.

Meantime Barney had been watching him from behind an ornamental hedge. The Irishman presently heard Pomp remark:

"Dis yere an' warm work dis mo'nin', an' soon as I done git dis yere tree cut right I'se a gwine to set down in de shade on dat hay-stack an' hab a smoke."

"Arrah! Bedad, here's a chance to scare the life out av the nagur. Sure, an' I've been tellin' av him ghost stories all the mornin', and he's ready to take fright at his shadow," said Barney.

Then he stole forward while Pomp's back was turned and crawled under the little haystack unseen.

Presently Pomp finished pruning the tree and then he walked leisurely to the haystack and sat down upon it and began to fill his pipe.

Barney meant to overthrow him in a moment, but just then Pomp's wife came hastily from the house and before Barney could make up his mind that the proper time for action had come, she plumped herself down beside Pomp on the stack and on Barney.

Now, as Mrs. Pomp weighed over two hundred and fifty pounds, the jolly Irishman suddenly discovered that the joke was on the wrong party.

Barney was crushed, and he couldn't move.

"Orrah! It's kilt I am intirely be the nagurs! Shure, an' I'll smother! Begob, if I iver git out, it's even wid the blackguard Pomp I'll be afther gettin'," said Barney mentally.

"Faith an' it's Africa over Oireland this toime, an' I wish me will was made," he went on to himself.

But he would rather suffer than betray himself then and let Pomp get the laugh on him.

So he kept still for several moments, while Pomp and his wife, blissfully unconscious that they were over a volcano in the form of an enraged Irishman, chatted away unconcernedly.

Barney began to think he would have to give it up and make his presence known. He was almost strangled.

But just as he was about to shout to Pomp and his wife to let him up the latter arose.

Barney felt the weight grow lighter, and he lost not a moment in improving his opportunity.

Suddenly he lifted his back like a bucking broncho and sent Pomp sprawling head over heels amidst a shower of flying hay.

To say that Pomp was frightened at this sudden upheaval would be putting it very mild.

He scrambled to his feet, and without stopping to look behind him he ran for the gate, which Frank and the doctor had reached just in time to see the fun.

"Fo' de Lawd, dat haystack done 'sploded!" yelled Pomp.

Then seeing Frank, Jr., and the doctor he stopped and looked back, as he heard Barney roaring with laughter.

The Irishman was executing a jig among the hay, while he gave free vent to his mirth.

Frank, Jr., and the doctor were obliged to laugh too, and Pomp saw it all then, and he was mad.

"Dat Irisher done put up dat job on dis gemman. But wait till I jis' telescopes him onct below de belt!" cried Pomp, ducking his head and getting ready to run at Barney and butt him.

It was only in that way, as he had found out by experience, that he could get the best of Barney. But Frank seized him by the arm.

"Come, come. Let there be no trouble. I want every one to feel happy on this day of my return," said Frank.

Then he shook hands with Pomp.

## CHAPTER II.

### TROUBLE AT THE WORK SHOP—FRANK ENGAGES THE STRANGER.

POMP was so glad to see Frank, Jr., that all his anger was forgotten in a moment, and Barney came forward in perfect safety, and warmly greeted the young inventor.

"Sure, an' it's a happy mon I am the day to see you safely back from the big city beyant, Masther Frank," said the jovial Irishman. "An' it's the truth I'm tellin', divil a wan av a ruction, at all, have we had since you were away."

"Dat's so, Mars Frank. We's got to be a reg'lar happy fam'ly Barney an' me has fo' suah," supplemented the dandy, grinning.

"I don't doubt it in the least—judging from what I've just witnessed," laughed Frank. "But tell me. How are the men getting on with my new invention?"

"Fust-rate, sah. Dat big sassage machine am beginnin' ter loom up, I tell yer, Mars Frank. De men are workin' away on it like good fellers down dar now," and Pomp pointed to the rear of the yard.

There was a large workhouse in which many inventions had already been constructed, and beyond it was an open plot of ground which Frank, Jr., had recently caused to be inclosed by a light fence about twelve feet high.

"Well, I'm very glad to hear that the work is going forward so well, and presently I shall have a look at the apparatus," replied Frank, Jr., and then he and the doctor passed on to the house.

Of course a warm welcome awaited the young inventor there, and while Mrs. Frank Reade, Jr., Frank's father and the doctor were conversing animatedly a little later, Barney came in with a bit of news.

"Sure, sur," said Barney, addressing Frank, Jr., "Mister McClintock, who was out wid his gun an' dog list wint by, and he was axin' me to tell ye that as he passed the camp av the tramp blackguards in the grove beyant he saw the spalpeens cuttin' clubs, an' sayin' among themselves if we didn't give 'em what they axed for the next toime they came here, they'd git even wid us."

"Well, if the lazy vagabonds come here, you drive 'em off double quick," said Frank, Jr., and then as Barney retired, the subject of the tramps was dismissed.

Not long after that Frank, Jr., and the doctor went out to the workshop.

The young inventor already had two skilled mechanics at work there upon some sections of his new aerial vessel.

He found that, as he had been, informed, the work had progressed rapidly during his absence, and his previously formed impression that the two mechanics were diligent and competent workmen was thus confirmed.

The two mechanics were named respectively Thomas Hall and James Blake.

The doctor asked a good many questions about

everything he saw, but as the air-ship was not as yet put together and so not in a condition to be properly explained Frank did not enlighten his friend much.

The next day Frank engaged three well-recommended mechanics who had been employed at the great machine shops in a neighboring city recently.

The new men came to work at once, and Frank soon found that one of them was a very superior man in every way, and he mentally decided to engage him as one of the crew for the new air-ship, if he could.

The name of this mechanic was Richard Sands, and he was a stalwart American, about thirty-five years of age.

Frank had already estimated that the crew of his wonderful aerial vessel should consist of eight persons. Of course he would be the captain, and he planned that the doctor should be the mate. He would then require an engineer, two assistants, two steersmen, and a cook. Pomp would make an excellent cook, and Barney could serve as one of the assistant engineers.

Frank had some conversation with Richard Sands, and found he was competent for the post of engineer, so he engaged him. Blake and Hall were also engaged for the voyage some days later.

There was yet one man lacking, however, to make up the crew of eight.

Dr. Vandyke was a frequent visitor to the workshop where Frank now superintended the construction of his air vessel, and the young inventor told his old friend that he had all his crew engaged save one man.

Dr. Vandyke laughed, and he remarked:

"I don't want to throw cold water on your very ambitious project, my dear boy, but don't you think you are going a little too fast in taking it for granted you will need a crew?"

"Still a doubter," said Frank, good-naturedly.

"Well, time will tell."

Meantime the material and supplies Frank had purchased arrived by rail, and Barney and Pomp found plenty of employment in hauling the same from the depot.

Frank kept the plans and drawings of his new invention in a tin box. In this it was his custom to take them out to the work-shop each day, and when it was necessary the mechanics were allowed to inspect the plans. But they were never permitted to pass out of Frank, Jr.'s sight.

At night he always kept the drawings and plans locked up in the tin box, which he invariably kept in his own sleeping room.

Those drafts had caused the young inventor more than a year of close study and labor, and of course he valued them beyond all price because he believed they would enable him to revolutionize the science of aerostatics and show mankind how to navigate the air as easily as they now traversed the seas with their ships.

If these plans were lost or destroyed, he would be obliged to finally abandon his great enterprise, or set to work and duplicate them. Perhaps he might fail to do so accurately, and then farewell to the dream of his crowning achievement forever.

Little wonder was it then, that Frank Reade, Jr., guarded the precious papers so closely—that he took every possible care to protect them from loss or destruction.

One night, probably a little more than a week after his return from New York, Frank, Jr., was awakened from a sound sleep an hour or so before dawn.

He scarcely knew at first to what he owed his awakening. But he started up on his couch and listened breathlessly. A moment elapsed and he did not hear a sound. Profound silence reigned in his sleeping chamber.

But all at once Frank heard a faint grating sound, and it came from the window. It seemed to the young inventor that he recognized the sound as that made in cutting glass.

Then like lightning the recollections came to his mind that, upon retiring, he had set the tin box containing all the plans and drawings of his great invention on the window sill.

Frank Reade, Jr.'s heart almost stood still for an instant, as it occurred to him that some one was trying to steal the box that contained what was, to him, a priceless treasure.

There was a heavy blind on the outside of the window, and Frank, Jr., knew he had closed it when he retired.

But now a ray of moonlight entered the window, and so he was assured that the blind was partially open.

Frank, Jr., drew a revolver which he always kept under his pillow out of its hiding-place. Almost at the same instant the light of the moon enabled him to see a hand thrust through a pane of glass opposite the tin box. It seemed an opening had been cut in the pane with a diamond.

Frank observed, excited though he naturally was, that the hand was a large and bony one, and



that upon the middle finger there was a great bloodstone ring of singular and unique design.

But with one leap Frank, Jr., reached the window and snatched away his precious box just as that talon-like hand was about to clutch it.

Instantly the hand was drawn away. The blind was closed with a bang, and Frank heard the sound of heavy, rapid footsteps as the owner of the hand beat a hasty retreat.

As quickly as possible the young inventor opened the window and the blind and looked out.

But he was unable to discover any one, although the light of the moon rendered objects readily visible at a considerable distance.

The would-be thief had made good his escape, and as there was a grove on the roadside opposite the residence, it was Frank's inference that the fellow had fled through that, since he would not have to go far to find concealment among the shadows of the trees.

As he did not think a pursuit of the rascal would be rewarded, Frank did not attempt to follow him.

He was not a little startled to think that such a daring attempt had been made to steal the plans which would be useless to any one save some skilled inventor, and one learned in the science of aerial navigation like himself.

Certainly, he thought, there could be but one answer to the question as to what the motive of the thief was.

Some one desired to appropriate his ideas and forestall him in the production of an air-ship that should be a success.

Frank Reade, Jr., resolved to be alert and watchful after that, but he kept the incident of the night a secret.

After this the work on the air-ship went forward steadily, and it was some days before anything was heard out of the common.

One morning, however, there was trouble at Frank Reade, Jr.'s work-shop.

Frank, Jr., was in the work-shop, and Richard Sands and the other two new men were in the yard outside, riveting some of the sections of the great air-vessel.

Suddenly the young inventor heard a tumult of voices—fierce threats and taunting cries.

He was about to go outside to ascertain the cause of the disturbance when the three men rushed into the shop followed by a shower of stones, one of which Frank, Jr., only escaped by dodging quickly.

Then he saw that a crowd of dirty, ragged-looking vagabonds, armed with clubs had forced their way into the yard, and he knew they were the band of tramps from the grove. Frank had spoken to the county sheriff about them, and requested that officer to remove them as vagrants and nuisances. The day before Barney and Pomp had refused to give them a barrel of potatoes, which they had demanded, and that very morning the sheriff had officially visited the tramp's camp and ordered them out of the county at once, stating, rather indiscreetly, that Frank Reade, Jr., had made a formal complaint against them.

So it came about that the tramps were now wrought up to the highest pitch of anger against the young inventor.

In some way they had obtained a supply of whisky and that rendered them reckless and desperate.

They numbered thirty men, and they were bent upon taking revenge upon Frank Reade, Jr., before the sheriff could assemble a force to drive them out of the county.

Frank Reade, Jr., sprang to the door of the work-shop toward which the infuriated, drunken mob of tramps was advancing.

"Halt where you are, men!" thundered Frank, as he quickly closed and secured the door.

But the tramps retorted with another volley of stones.

Hall and Blake had now left their work and they with the other men rallied around Frank, Jr.

Just then the voice of Barney was heard by the inmates of the besieged work-shop. The Irishman roared:

"Arrah! Ye murtherin' blackguards av the world! Out av the way wid yez or begob if it's a ruction yez want faith an' I'm the mon yez are lookin' for!"

"Dat's what's de matter! I'se right long wid yer Barney, an' w's ull make dem white trash scatter fo' suah!" answered the voice of Pomp.

The truth was, Barney was now in his element and Pomp was happy too. The prospect of a ruction with the tramps was just "nuts" for the Irishman.

He and Pomp were at work packing away a supply of powder, bullets and dynamite cartridges, which Frank, Jr., intended to take with him on his air voyage when the tramps attacked the work-shop. The place in which they were storing away the explosives for a time, was the ice-house at the rear of the yard, about fifty yards distant from the work-shop.

Now, the Irishman and the darky both knew that among the things for the air voyage that had been put in the workshop was a breech-loading field piece mounted on a pivot.

As soon as he saw the tramps were really in a dangerous mood Barney said to Pomp:

"Be the powers av turf, Pomp, we hev got to git through the crowd av blackguards beyant an' carry ammunition to Mather Frank. Sure an' I'm thinkin' he'll nade it."

Barney made the last remark as one of the leaders of the tramps shouted:

"Come on, boys; let's loot the shop!"

In a moment Pomp had a bag of powder and bullets slung across his back and secured there, leaving his arms free.

Barney was laden in the same way, and while he brandished his heavy club as a "shillalah" he shouted the defiance which the inmates of the workhouse heard.

"Sure, Pomp, we have got to charge the blackguards. Yez best git a sprig av a sthick like me own, an' it's a rale ould Donnybrook ruction we'll be afther havin' wid crackin' the heads av the spalpeens!" he added.

"Dat's all right. I'se got all de weapons I wants. Dis ole cocoanut ob mine am de boss buttin' machine, an' when I turns myself loose suflin' has got to drop, an' dar's a razor in dat right boot leg," replied Pomp.

"Thin be the tail av Biddy Nolan's goat that reached into ould Ireland and rang St. Patrick's bell, come on wid yez. Whoop! Erin-go-bragh!"

And then Barney and Pomp charged upon the tramps like a cyclone. The vagabonds had now attacked the door of the workhouse. But they desisted as Barney and Pomp rushed at them.

Right through the mob toward the door the two brave fellows fought their way.

Barney hit a head whenever he saw one, which was real Donnybrook sport, and every man who got in Pomp's way was butted out of time. The darky would duck his head and shoot forward, and over would go the party his head struck.

Meanwhile to Frank, Jr., the situation was becoming quite serious. He realized that if the tramps succeeded in forcing an entrance into the work-shop they might destroy the air-ship, which was now so far advanced in the process of construction. Then, too, he and his men might be placed in actual peril of their lives.

"If I only had some ammunition I might at least make use of the field-piece to frighten away the tramps. But every ounce of powder is stored in the ice-house. I did not like to risk keeping it here for fear of fire," said Frank, Jr., to Sands.

Then he ordered the men to bring the field-piece forward and train it upon the door. This was promptly done.

The tramps had never seen such desperate fighters as Barney and Pomp, and they gave way before them.

The Irishman and the darky reached the work-shop door and were admitted.

Frank, Jr., was delighted when he saw the ammunition they had brought, and he quickly made a blank cartridge and loaded the field-piece with it.

Then he shouted to the tramps:

"Disperse, men. Be off at once, or I shall protect my property by opening fire on you with a cannon!"

But the tramps did not heed this admonition.

"Throw open the door!" ordered Frank Reade, Jr.

His command was obeyed, and, as the door opened, the startled tramps looked into the muzzle of the field-piece, which was trained upon them, and saw Frank Reade, Jr., standing ready to discharge it.

Instantly the mob wavered.

Then Frank discharged the field-piece. The loud report rang out and the cannon belched forth fire and smoke. But no one was hurt by the blank cartridge. Frank Reade, Jr.'s, purpose was accomplished, however. The tramps broke and fled. They did not know about the blank cartridge, of course. They did not return, and from that day the tramps gave the young inventor no further trouble.

The same day, just as Frank and his men were about to quit work for the day, Dr. Vaneyke entered the workshop with a strange man clad in a checked "jumper" and overalls. But though he was dressed like a mechanic, and his hands were grimy, he, somehow, did not look exactly like a working man.

The stranger's face was pale, his eyes were strangely brilliant, he wore his hair long, and he had an intellectual cast of features.

Dr. Vaneyke introduced the stranger under the name of Smith Brown, and said he was a poor man out of work whose family were suffering. The stranger claimed to be a skilled mechanic, and Frank engaged him. So well did he please Frank that a few days later he booked him as the eighth man of the crew of the air-ship.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE QUEEN CLIPPER OF THE CLOUDS STARTS ON THE GREAT VOYAGE.

SMITH BROWN proved to be indeed an excellent man, and Frank, Jr., congratulated himself upon his acquisition. He was a very quiet and reserved person, sober and willing, attentive to all instructions, and quick to comprehend.

With the force of men Frank, Jr., now had employed the work of building the air-ship was at length completed, and one evening the young inventor announced that the task was done.

And as the good doctor was present, he added with pardonable pride:

"It is a triumph of science and invention."

"When can we inspect it and hear you explain it?" asked the doctor.

"In the morning," replied Frank, Jr.

And so the following day the doctor presented himself at the Reade mansion at an early hour, and then he and Frank, Jr., and old Mr. Reade went out to the inclosed yard adjoining the workshop. There rested the wonderful new flying machine—the air-ship which Frank, Jr., believed was destined to astonish the world.

"Admirable!" exclaimed the doctor. "It is for all the world very much like a clipper-built ship!"

"Yes, and hence the name I have chosen for it," replied Frank, Jr., indicating a line of beautiful gift lettering on the side of the majestic vessel just below the deck line.

"THE QUEEN CLIPPER OF THE CLOUDS," read the doctor. "An appropriate name indeed, Frank," he commented.

"You know, doctor, the bird raises itself by beating the air with its wings. Now in the flying-machine its weight is raised by striking the air obliquely with the fins or wings of the screw. These wings are in my invention disposed as a helix. The helix always advances in the direction of its axis. So those wings revolving upon a vertical or perpendicular support, raise the flying machine and sustain it in the air by means of their revolutions. So much for the suspensory power. Now for the propulsion. The ship is propelled by means of the revolving wings or fins moving on a horizontal axis. The whole of my flying machine depends upon these two movements. One series of fins revolving vertically hold it suspended in the air, the other drives it along, under conditions that are marvelously adapted for speed and safety."

Thus explained Frank, Jr.

But let us sketch the air-ship minutely, so that the reader can understand just how it looked and all about its workings.

To make it more easily comprehensible we will consider first the deck or platform.

This was a frame work a hundred feet long and twelve wide, like a ship's deck with a projecting prow. Beneath was a hull solidly built, inclosing the engines, the water tanks and the stores and tools of all kinds.

Round the deck a few light uprights supported a wire trellis that did duty for bulwarks. On the deck were three cabins, whose compartments were used for the crew or as machine rooms. Under the hull was a system of flexible springs to ease off the concussion when the ship came down on the earth.

All the cabins were lightened by port-holes filled with toughened glass, which has ten times the resistance of ordinary glass.

In the bow there were the cook's galley and the crew's quarters; in the stern were several cabins, including that of the engineer, the saloon, and above all a glass house in which stood the helmsman, who steered the vessel by means of a powerful rudder.

The machine that drove the suspensory helices or wings was in the center house on the deck. These held the ship up.

In that forward was the machine that drove the bow screw. In that aft was the driving machine of the stern screw. These were the propelling power.

The Queen Clipper of the Clouds had thirty-seven vertical axes or masts rising above the deck.

There were fifteen along each side and seven more elevated in the center.

But the air-ship was entirely destitute of sails.

Their place was, however, most admirably supplied.

Instead of sails each mast bore two horizontal screws with fins not very large in spread but that could be driven at great speed. Each of these axes had its movement independent of the rest and each alternate one spun round in a direction different from the other.

In this way any tendency to gyration was obviated.

The screws as they rose retained their equilibrium by the horizontal resistance. There were seventy-four suspensory screws.

At the bow and the stern, mounted on horizontal axes, were two propelling screws, each with four



arms. These screws were of much larger diameter than the suspensory ones, but could be worked at the same speed.

After Frank Reade, Jr., made the explanatory remarks recorded a few paragraphs back the doctor and Mr. Reade, Sr., stood and looked at the air-ship for some moments in silent wonder.

Their scientific knowledge enabled them to understand what we have set forth by the way of explanation. But the doctor presently said:

"Didn't you tell me you employed no electro-motor?"

"Certainly, doctor, although my motive power is electricity, as I also told you. I trust to piles and accumulators entirely; the piles are of the most extraordinary strength, and the accumulators yield electric currents more powerful than the world has ever before known."

"Ah, then you have invented new chemical combinations?"

"Yes," admitted Frank; "and the elements of the electric piles and the construction of the accumulators are secrets known only to myself."

"Amazing! I am forced to yield. I begin to lose my doubts of your ultimate success. I think you have solved the problem of aerial navigation," said the doctor.

Frank, Jr., was delighted, and he went on to say:

"You see, my powerful currents give me the power to drive the screws and communicate a suspending and propelling force in excess of all my requirements under any circumstances."

"True, true!" admitted the doctor.

"There is no danger of the ship capsizing. Its center of gravity proves that," Frank, Jr., continued.

"And the material of which it is made—not wood, not metal—so you said. Now for the secret! What is it?" demanded the doctor.

"You shall know. The material of which the air-ship is made is simply—paper!"

"Bravo!" exclaimed the doctor, and Mr. Reade, Sr., enthusiastically echoed the words.

"By means of a chemical process and hydraulic pressure paper is reduced to a material as hard as steel, and far lighter than metal. It was this lightness and solidity which I availed myself of in building The Queen Clipper of the Clouds. Everything—frame-work, hull, houses, are made of paper, and it is fire-proof. The different parts of the engines and screws are made of gelatinized fibers, which combines in a sufficient degree flexibility and resistance. It is insoluble in most acids, and possesses insulating properties, which renders it most valuable in my electric machinery," said Frank, Jr.

"And now about your supplies?" asked the doctor.

"I have made out a list of the supplies which I have already on board. Here it is, doctor. Please read it, and see if I have forgotten anything."

Frank, Jr., handed a paper to the doctor, who read the contents of the same thus:

"List of supplies for The Queen Clipper of the Clouds.

"A light India-rubber boat insubmersible, which will carry eight men on water, fishing appliances, arms of the chase and of war, instruments of observation, compasses and sextants for checking the course, thermometers, different barometers for estimating the height attained, others for forecasting tempest, electric lights, a small library, a portable printing press, a field piece throwing a three inch shell, a supply of powder, bullets and dynamite cartridges, a cooking stove warmed by currents from the accumulators, a stock of preserved meat and vegetables to last for months, the tanks full of water."

"I must say, Frank, I can think of nothing more," the good doctor said when he had read the list.

"I thought you would think of parachutes to use in case of accident, but the fact is, doctor, I don't think they can possibly be needed. As the axes of the screws are independent the stoppage of a few will not affect the motion of the others, and if only half are working the Queen Clipper can keep afloat in the air," replied Frank, Jr.

To this the doctor assented.

That very day a trial ascension was made which demonstrated the truth of all Frank, Jr., claimed for the air-ship.

Then the doctor said:

"I am with you for this voyage in the air, Frank. It is sure to be the grandest and most wonderful ever undertaken by man."

It was decided that the next day the Queen Clipper of the Clouds should start upon her first voyage through space.

That evening as Frank, Jr., and his father were seated in the library Mr. Reade, Sr., read the following in an evening newspaper:

The strange disappearance of Professor Leonidas Wickersham, late professor of natural sci-

ences in King's University and well known as an inventor."

The account went on to tell that for some time past the professor's family and friends had thought him insane, and were thinking of placing him in an asylum.

The concluding paragraph of the article ran thus:

"It is now conjectured that the professor, with the cunning of insanity, discovered the intention of his family and so fled. Though his disappearance occurred weeks ago the facts have just been made public. In the meantime the unfortunate man's family have caused a close private search to be made for him, but without success."

Mr. Reade, Sr., had read a pamphlet published by the professor, and he talked with Frank about his disappearance with considerable interest.

The following morning, as the fact had been made public that he would then launch his air-ship, Frank Reade, Jr., found a vast crowd assembled around the yard in which The Queen Clipper of the Clouds rested.

It was a clear, beautiful day. Very soon Frank, Jr., Dr. Vaneyke, Barney and Pomp, and the rest of the crew the young inventor had engaged, including Smith Brown, were on board the air-vessel.

It was gayly decorated with flags and everything was ready for a flight. The crew were assigned to their stations. Richard Sands took the post of chief engineer in the center deck house, Tom Hall was made helmsman and occupied the glass house in the stern, where he could work the great rudder, Blake was the other steersman, Barney and Smith Brown were the assistant engineers, Pomp was named for cook, and of course the doctor was "Captain" Frank Reade, Jr.'s, first mate.

Finally, standing by the rail with the doctor at his side, Frank gave the engineers the word.

Then the powerful currents were turned on to the machinery from the wonderful electric accumulators, and the suspensory helices began to revolve at the top of the thirty-seven masts.

With a whirring sound like the flight of a thousand birds, the air-ship arose majestically in the atmosphere.

Up, up she soared, while the cheers of the spectators burst forth in hearty tones of admiration.

When an elevation of several hundred feet was attained, Frank gave the word to turn on the current to the propelling machines fore and aft, which were not as yet working. The order was at once obeyed by Barney and Smith Brown.

Then as the great horizontal fans at bow and stern began to revolve Frank gave the helmsman his course, and the air-ship sailed away "Westward ho!"

And just then a horseman, riding at speed, dashed up to the crowd on the earth below.

Frank and the doctor saw him gesticulate to them wildly, and form a trumpet of his hands and shout at them. But they were unable to hear what he said, and the air-ship sailed on.

The wonderful voyage was auspiciously begun.

But what did the horseman who arrived too late say. He shouted these words:

"You have on board Professor Leonidas Wickersham, the crazy scientist and inventor."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE WONDERS OF THE QUEEN CLIPPER FURTHER EXPLAINED.

THERE was something exalting in the sentiments and sensations which the captain and crew of the Queen Clipper of the Clouds experienced as the majestic air-ship bore them onward high above the realms of mortals.

The pathless sea of the atmosphere all around them, with its vast infinitude of space—endless and immeasurable—contributed a sense of the grandeur of the unknown universe surrounding our world that caused all to think how little, how insignificant, indeed, was man and all his works.

Never before did Frank Reade, Jr., or good Dr. Vaneyke realize as completely how wonderful, beyond all the wisdom of man, was the plan of creation and the laws that governed all the works of the great Creator.

The grand mechanism of the master power that held all the planets in their orbits and guided their eternal revolutions through the endless cycles of time was out of sight—unseen even as the mighty power that governs the coming and going of the unceasing round of the seasons—yet the air voyagers felt that hidden influence as in way that caused them to remain awed and silent while all the wondrous panorama of our world was spread out before them like some grand landscape under the wand of a mighty magician. As the Queen Clipper of the Clouds sailed onward, the view from the deck was constantly changing.

The scenes blended into each other with all the

rare harmony of light, color, and diversity of subject which nature's lavish brush had painted. There were busy, thriving, western towns, peaceful, sleepy hamlets, where one might think to find at last the new Arcadia, far-reaching farm-lands, yielding bountiful harvests, and vast plains and forests, with streams and rivers threading their verdant depths like threads of silver amidst emerald settings.

And then the sense of infinite solitude and infinite silence, broken only by the unceasing whirr of the thirty-seven helices revolving at the mast-heads, and the slower and more labored beating of the great bow and stern propellers.

The voyagers had indeed entered upon a new world—the world of the atmosphere, and it was an experience tending to expand their minds and render them humble in the sight of the creator of it all.

"Grand, magnificent, surpassingly beautiful!" involuntarily exclaimed the doctor.

"It is! it is! And now, my dear doctor, I am receiving the reward of all my labor in inventing and constructing this machine for aerial locomotion," replied Frank Reade, Jr.

"And no one can ever again refute your theory of sailing the air, for its truth is demonstrated. At what rate of speed are we going now?"

"About eleven knots an hour," replied Frank, Jr., glancing at a dial something like the face of a clock, that was set firmly in the side of the center turret and covered by a plate of toughened glass. On this dial the hands recorded the revolutions of the great propelling screws, and as the young inventor had already figured out the number of feet gained by each revolution of the propellers, he could tell the rate of speed by reading the number of revolutions per minute.

"And you can guide your air-ship as well as vessels are directed upon the trackless ocean?"

"Yes. Look yonder at Steersman Hall at the wheel in the glass house in the stern. With his eyes on the compass he follows the route I give without deviation."

"I see. Yes, everything is provided for, and if I mistake not we can go much faster."

"Faster! Doctor, so to say, we are only crawling now. The torpedo boat goes twenty knots an hour, railway trains sixty, ice-boats sixty-five, Foster's engine eighty-four. I make these statements that you may comprehend how I have surpassed all known speed in locomotive machines, when I say 'The Queen Clipper of the Clouds' can make one hundred and twenty knots an hour."

"Frank, you fairly take away my breath! One hundred and twenty knots an hour!"

"Yes, sir, and that too without danger under favorable circumstances—that is to say when storms are not encountered."

"I believe you. Anything is possible with your air-ship after this. But no machine lighter than the air could do it."

"Certainly not." You comprehend, of course, that the air surrounds the Queen Clipper as it does the sub-marine boat, and in it my propellers act precise like the screws of a steamer."

"I can grasp all that; but I want to ask a few questions further."

"Proceed, doctor, and it shall be my pleasure to enlighten you to the best of my ability."

"Well, then, while I see that to ascend you only have to increase the speed of the suspensory helices and shut off the propellers, and to go down you need only gradually decrease the suspensory power. Suppose you want to make a landing under adverse circumstances, say in a high wind or in a storm?"

"Very well," replied Frank, Jr., readily. "I am not at all troubled, even under such conditions as you have supposed. You must know that I am provided with a cable one hundred and fifty feet long with an anchor at the end."

"Excellent! But further. You see, Frank, I am resolved to test your air-ship under all conditions, since there is nothing more valuable to me than my life, which I have trusted to it. Now, we will take another instance. I suppose you admit that it may become necessary to pass over the highest mountains?"

"Certainly, doctor."

"And at such high altitude you know the atmosphere is too rare to sustain life? Are we all to run the risk of becoming asphyxiated?"

"I rather think not. Why, that would have been a culpable oversight indeed! No, no! The fact is, doctor, I considered the point you have just made at the very outset. With the inception of my idea of the aerial apparatus came the reflection that we must have good breathing—well oxygenized air at our command when compelled to visit the higher zones of the atmosphere."

"How have you provided for that?"

"You will find special apparatus which I have duly tested and found admirable for the purpose, for renewing the oxygen in the cabins. That is to



say I can manufacture my own oxygen on board when the external atmosphere refuses to yield me a supply."

"Frank, you are a wonder, I congratulate you again!" claimed the good doctor, in hearty admiration.

The young inventor looked pleased. The praise of such a man as the learned old scientist was indeed something to be proud of.

"But," resumed the latter, "In a dark night when there is no moon and the stars even are invisible, what is to prevent our suddenly coming in violent collision with some towering abrupt mountain peak. Ah, such a catastrophe would mean a frightful wreck. We should not have a single chance for our lives, my dear boy."

"Doctor, surely you do not think I would for a moment jeopardize my own life as well as my comrades for want of nocturnal illumination? Oh, no, indeed. You forget the electric light," replied Frank, Jr.

"Indeed, for the moment I did."

"See, Yonder on the roof of the center turret is a nebula of electric jets closely grouped and provided with a burnished reflector of great size and brilliancy, mounted upon a pivot and so arranged that it can be made to reflect the whole volume of the powerful electric light in any desired direction."

"Yes, I see the arrangement of the light is excellent. On dark nights you have only to reflect it ahead on the course of the air-ship, and keep a lookout in the bow."

"Precisely, and the large silver bell in the frame on the turret in the bows is an alarm bell intended to be rung to call all hands, in case of danger of any kind."

Pomp had come out of the cook's galley in the bows, while the doctor and Frank, Jr., were conversing, and he now drew nearer, and scratching his wool with an amusing air of perplexity, he asked:

"What done gits me, Mars Frank, am how you is gwine fer ter tell how high up you is goin'. Dat conundrum I've been studyin' on till I've gittin' way off in my base."

"That's easy enough, Pomp. We have different barometers and some are used for estimating the height attained," replied Frank, smiling.

"Dat's all right, I specs, but it am too much fo' dis coon. I specs now you'll gofer to tole dat you can up an' tell jus' whar we am, s'pose you woke up one ob dese fine mornin's and found dat we wan't nowhere, jus' hangin' over de sea, wid no lan' in sight," and Pomp looked as if he had sprung a poser on his young master.

"Certainly. We should take an observation of the sun at the moment it arose and from that calculate our latitude and longitude according to the rules, and with the instruments employed by navigators at sea."

"I'se out ob my depth an' so I'll swim back to my soup. Specs da ain't nuffin' but you kin find out if you done want to," said Pomp, and back he went to his pots and pans.

Then Frank and the doctor inspected the ship, going from one deck-house to the other and examining the machinery.

"You see, doctor," said Frank, Jr., pausing in the central house where chief engineer Sands sat at the levers, "here are the great main levers that turn on the electric currents to the machinery in the bow and the aft cabin for the propellers. As well as the great apparatus for driving the suspensory screws. So it is not necessary that the assistant engineers should be at their posts all the time. In fair weather they need only look in at the machine once in a while, keep the bearings well oiled and the brakes properly set."

"But the head engineer, or some one in his place, must always be on duty I think."

"It is, as a matter of necessity, that he should be so. But if he was to absent himself for a short time, leaving all the levers set, probably no damage would transpire," replied Frank, Jr.

"Where are your wonderful electric piles and accumulators? You surely must have a battery-room?"

"Yes. It is situated under the center turret below deck amidship, and is reached by the companionway stairs."

Passing to the stern-house, Frank, Jr., and the doctor paused at the door. Both started a trifle almost at the same instant, for they beheld a picture of a man in a state of wrapt exultation of mind and intense mental excitement.

Smith Brown crouched rather than sat at a bench before the levers of the stern propelling machine. Before him on the bench a sheet of white drawing paper was spread out, and, bending close to it, he was working rapidly with a pencil.

His eyes were like two coals of living fire, so preternaturally brilliant was their consuming light. His face was pale as death, and his intellectual brow was drawn in rigid lines that betokened intense thought.

The strange man's breath came in quick, panting respirations, like one fatigued. His features twitched and worked as though the nerves, strained to too great a tension, were acting independently of his will.

That every power of his intellect was concentrated upon the work before him it seemed clear.

But almost as Frank Reade, Jr., and his companion paused at the door of the machine-room, the assistant engineer heard them.

Instantly he started to his feet. His pale, studious face lost its white, livid look and flushed like one detected in something wrong.

But if any vague suspicion had permeated the minds of Frank Reade, Jr., or the good doctor, certainly Smith Brown took the very best course to dispel it. "See!" he exclaimed with seeming frankness, "I have made a rough sketch of a scene from the landscape below."

Thus speaking, he held out the drawing paper and Frank, Jr., and the doctor saw that really, as he said, upon it was sketched a landscape. It was very well done, too.

"You are quite an artist and an enthusiast in that line too. But be sure you do not neglect the propelling machine for the pencil," said Frank, Jr.

"Never fear for that, sir," respectfully replied Smith Brown, drawing a deep breath.

Frank and the doctor inspected the machine, and then they went to the staterooms in the stern.

There were two of these, and both compartments were fitted up with almost Oriental luxuriance. The doctor expressed himself as pleased beyond measure.

The small library which Frank had brought along was in his cabin, but he invited the doctor to make free with it at all times.

"Thank you, my boy. I should be unhappy without books. I shall spend many a quiet evening with them in the cabin while we are floating among the clouds, I foresee," said he.

Meantime, when Smith Brown was left alone, he laughed a low, cunning laugh, and reversed the drawing-paper, showing the side which he had been at work on when he was interrupted, for he had not shown Frank, Jr., that side.

The young inventor would have been astounded if he had seen what was then revealed. Upon that side was a draft of the Queen Clipper of the Clouds, with specifications in accurate figures in many places.

"Ha! ha! I'll steal the secret yet, or perhaps capture this air-ship!" uttered the strange man, exultantly.

## CHAPTER V.

### A DARK OBJECT IN THE SKY.

SOME hours later, Barney came out of the bow cabin and said to Frank Reade, Jr., who stood by the rail conversing with the doctor:

"If ye plaze, Masther Frank, sure an' it's not intended for a burd I'm thinkin' I was, for, begob, I'm say-sick wid flyin' already. Worra, but a wee drop av the crayture would save the life av me. Worra, me stomach!" and Barney doubled up like a jack-knife, with his hands holding onto his stomach as though he was afraid it would get away from him, while his comical mug looked as though he was in great pain.

The truth was, Barney was working for a drink. He was a true Irishman in his love for the "mountain dew" and his fondness for a "ruction."

He knew there was some fine old rye whiskey on board, and his mouth watered to sample it.

But Frank, Jr., knew well enough what the rascal was up to, but with great seeming solicitude he said to the doctor, who also knew Barney's weakness:

"Doctor, you will have to give the poor fellow something."

Now the doctor was a medical graduate and he had a case of drugs on board, so he caught a wink from Frank and hastened to open his case and produce a bottle.

"Sure, an' it's not that kind of medicine I want," said Barney, looking a trifle rueful.

"But it's just what you need. True, it will make you very sick and probably keep you in your bunk a couple of days, but it will do you good," replied the doctor, taking up a bottle that smelt horribly.

"Begob, I'm gettin' better. Faith, an' the smell av it will be all I nade. Sure, an' midioine always took hold av me whole family mighty aisy. There was me Uncle Pat. Be the powers av turf, a bottle av patent midioine to make the hair grow fell out av a windy an' struck him on the bald head, an' divil a worrud av a lie is there in it, nixt mornin' he had as fine a head av hair as iver grew."

"But," insisted the doctor, "you better take one dose."

"No, no! Faith, an' I'm well intirely," and Barney straightened up as if by magic.

"Yah! yah! yah! Irish got fooled on de whiskey dat time, fo' suah!" laughed Pomp, who had come

to the door of the cook house and heard what had just passed.

"Git out, ye nagur! Would yez give a sick man the laugh, ye blackguard av the worruld. Begob, I'll put a head on yez, so I will," roared Barney, and he made a run at the darky.

But Pomp closed the door and fastened it, and Frank Reade laughingly called Barney to order, and forbade any breach of the peace between him and the colored citizen.

At noon Pomp served a most excellent meal in the dining-room or saloon in the stern cabin.

There was fresh meat, vegetables and fruit, and excellent soup. This last was made from a kind of bread manufactured from equal parts of flour and meat and worked together with lard. It would be excellent food on a long voyage.

The finest cigars and wine were served to Frank and the doctor by Pomp, who served as waiter as well as cook. The men had their dinner in their quarters in the bow, which corresponded to the fore-castle and messroom of a regular sea-going vessel.

The afternoon saw the Queen Clipper of the Clouds pass over several western cities, including Omaha, the railroad center for numerous systems. The sky travelers caught a view of the yellow waters of the Missouri, and then the brick and wooden houses of the city passed beneath them.

When night fell the air-ship was sailing over a vast expanse of prairie. The homes of civilized man had been left behind, only the wild solitude was below.

At intervals the silence was broken by the howl of a wolf or the bellowing of a distant buffalo.

There was no moon, but the stars came out—a multitude of twinkling, silvery zones to light the somber blue vault they lavishly studded.

At about ten o'clock the lookout on the bow cabin called Frank Reade, Jr.

Blake, the assistant helmsman, was now acting as lookout, and when the young inventor joined him, he said:

"I don't know rightly what it is, sir, for I can't make it out plainly, but there's some large dark object drifting along yonder between us and the sky. See! It shuts out the light of the stars for a space."

Frank Reade, Jr., produced a night-glass and inspected the object which the lookout indicated; then he called the doctor up from the deck.

The latter looked through the night-glass at Frank's request, and then he said:

"I think it must be a large balloon."

"Such is my opinion. But we can't be sure yet, owing to the distance," replied Frank, Jr.

"But," he added, looking through the night-glass again, "I think it is drifting toward us and gradually descending, owing to a change in the density of the atmosphere."

Meantime all hands had now discovered the dark object that was sweeping down upon them from the sky.

Pomp was frightened. Like all negroes the honest fellow had a strong vein of superstition in his nature.

Barney tried to seem very brave and unconcerned, but in his childhood he had believed in the "banshee" and he was not by any means at ease now.

"Fo' de good Lawd!" said Pomp to Barney, while his teeth chattered. "I specs dat am a great big bomshel gwine ter bust we uns all ter smash fer our sins. Oh, Lawd! I wish I wasn't sich a wicked nigger."

"Shut up, nigger. Faith an' it's nothin' at all, at all," said Barney, but his legs trembled.

"What yah shakin' in yer shocs fur if it ain't nuffin'?" demanded Pomp, indignantly.

At that moment a sudden gust of wind came shrieking through the helices overhead, causing a sound like a wall of human agony.

"Oh, Lawd! oh, Lawd!" yelled Pomp.

"Worra! Worra! The saints protect us. It's kilt we are!" cried Barney, and down he and Pomp went on their knees at the door of the cook's galley.

And the mysterious object from the sky came nearer and nearer. If it was a great meteorological body or a miniature planet falling from its orbit then indeed the danger of the air-ship was very great.

Terrible, indeed, would be the momentum of such a falling body. Its contact with the Queen Clipper of the Clouds would mean the total destruction of that vessel.

There would ensue a w.

which no human soul could survive.

And after all Frank Reade, Jr., and Dr. Vaneyke were not sure it was a balloon. They thought no doubt of the possible character of the falling body which we have suggested. Both looked anxious.

A period of suspense ensued.

As yet the electric light had not been lighted, for the stars gave light enough for navigation.

But as now, after the lapse of a few moments, the



dark object above the air-ship was yet nearer, Frank's night-glass finally enabled him to decide positively that it was a balloon.

"Come, men!" he shouted to Barney and Pomp. "Turn on the electric light and set the great reflector so as to throw the illumination on the coming object. It's only a balloon!"

"Begob, that's what I told ye. Sure an' it's the big coward ye are, nagur!" cried Barney, greatly relieved.

"Dat's all right! I wan't afraid! Yah! Yah! I see only tryin' to scare you," replied Pomp.

And they ran up to the top of the center cabin and quickly turned on the electric light and reflected its rays on the object above.

Then it was distinctly revealed in the diverging plane of the electric halo.

The object was a large balloon, and the carriage under the great inflated globe contained two men. But the two aeronauts were in singular positions. One hung face downward with his arms and shoulders over the rim of the carriage. The other seemed to have fallen over backward half out of the basket.

But a hasty observation convinced Frank Reade that the two aeronauts were dead, and that the balloon was adrift at the mercy of the winds.

Descending from the roof of the bow cabin Frank got ready a rope and a grappling-iron. Then, while Barney, Pomp, Blake and the doctor all held on to the rope, as soon as the drifting balloon came within range, the young inventor cast the grappling-hook.

The first cast fell short, and the second failed to fix the hook in the carriage of the balloon, at which the inventor aimed. But the third attempt proved successful.

That time the hook caught in the basket, as the carriage of a balloon is frequently designated.

The rope was hauled in, and the balloon was brought up to the side of the deck.

Then the rope was made fast to the capstan, and the balloon rode at the side of The Queen Clipper of the Clouds with the carriage on a level with the deck.

All hands crowded forward to look at the dead aeronauts. Smith Brown was among the others. If the attention of all had not been directed to the dead men, Smith Brown's manner must have excited comment.

At the sight of the dead balloonists he grew pale as death and started violently. A look of recognition came into his face, and it was evident that he had known the unfortunate balloonists in life.

Reverently the two bodies were lifted out of the carriage and placed side by side on the deck.

Then Pomp and Barney, who had climbed into the carriage, began to hand its contents out to those on the deck of the air-ship.

Among other things was a small chest securely locked.

On one of the dead men meantime Frank Reade, Jr., found a paper which told that the aeronauts were named respectively James Lake and Donald Payne, and that they had ascended from Kansas City a week previously. Upon close examination of their bodies they were found to have perished from asphyxiation. No doubt they had ventured to go too high, and had both been suddenly overcome at once by the rare air.

Frank, Jr., and Dr. Vaneyke retired to the center cabin, under the electric light, to read the diary of the aeronauts which was also found on the person of one of them.

Barney and Pomp got everything out of the balloon carriage, and the other men of the crew went back to their posts. But the Irishman and the darky remained in the balloon examining everything with childish curiosity.

Accidentally Pomp came down heavily on Barney's pet corn, and then laughed, because he couldn't help it, when Barney instantly began to hop around and say bad words.

That made Barney angry indeed, and he flew at Pomp. They clinched and struggled in the carriage of the balloon.

Suddenly there was a snapping sound. The hook that held the carriage to the air-ship gave way, and the next moment Barney and Pomp were adrift in the escaped balloon.

#### CHAPTER VI.

##### BARNEY AND POMP ADRIFT—LAND PIRATES.

THE Irishman and the darky suddenly became aware of the serious accident that had befallen them when they were distant about fifty feet from the air-ship.

Meantime no one on board The Queen Clipper of the Clouds had as yet discovered that the balloon had escaped. Frank Reade, Jr., and the doctor were yet occupied with the perusal of the aeronauts' diary.

The other men had their attention taken up by their respective duties.

For a moment after they comprehended that they were really adrift in the lost balloon Barney

and Pomp stood locked in each other's arms, as they were when they made the startling discovery.

They were stricken speechless.

Pomp's wool began to stand up like a "fright wig," and Barney got white around the mouth. There they clung to each other trembling in every limb, while the frail carriage swayed under them dangerously, as the wind began to freshen.

But all at once a simultaneous yell burst from their lips laden with intonations of absolute terror.

"Help! Sabe us! Oh, glori mighty, Mars Frank, we's goners!" cried Pomp as Barney vociferated: "Shop her! Oh, worra! worra! It's kilt I'll be along wid the nagur!"

Frank Reade, Jr., and the doctor sprang to their feet as if electrified. Instantly then they discerned the cause of the outcry. They had become seated a moment before.

"The balloon has drifted away and we are leaving her behind!" cried Frank, Jr.

"Have courage! Don't lose your heads! I will rescue you!" he shouted to encourage the unlucky pair.

The next moment he had made the transit to the bell rope at the side of the bow cabin and rang an alarm.

At once every remaining man of the crew came from their posts out upon the air-ship's deck in great haste.

All were evidently very much excited when they saw what had occurred, except Richard Sands, the chief engineer. He seemed to be a man absolutely without nerve, so cool and composed was he.

The most excited person was Smith Brown. His pale, intellectual face worked nervously, and he laughed hysterically.

"Gone—gone away to the sky where others will follow!" he cried.

Frank Reade, Jr., issued his orders looking to the recapture of the escaped balloon promptly. Of course, in order to have made the long distance which she had traversed, the air-ship had traveled at a high rate of speed for the most part of the time, but she was now running slowly. There was a gentle breeze, and the vessel was going with the wind.

As soon as he saw that the crew fully understood his orders, Frank shouted:

"Now, then, every man to his post until the bell taps again!"

The engineers returned to the machine rooms, and promptly the propellers were shut down and the air-ship almost ceased to move, while the suspensory helices continued to spin round, and so maintain the vessel in the same plain.

The idea was to hold the air-ship until the balloon, which, of course, drifted after her before the wind, overtook her or came within reach of the grappling-hook.

Meantime poor Barney and Pomp forgot all about their quarrel, and thought only that they were comrades in misfortune.

"Sure, an' I axes yer pardon, Pomp. Faith, an' it's a fine colored man ye are," said Barney, humbly.

"Dat's all right, Barney. Golly, I didn't go fur to stomp on yer corn nohow," amicably rejoined Pomp.

And so peace was made between them, and they shook hands to ratify the truce.

They saw the air-ship lay to, and they began to hope that they might be saved.

The balloon continued to steadily drift after the Queen Clipper, but Frank Reade, Jr., soon observed that its course would take it by the air-ship to the westward.

Then he issued the necessary orders to the steersman and the assistant engineer, Blake now taking the bow machine, and the air-ship was skillfully tacked to the westward a few points. Then the balloon, after a period of uncertainty, came near enough, and Frank, Jr., made a lucky cast and caught the carriage with the grappling-hook again.

As before, the crew assisted him to draw in, and finally the balloon was brought alongside once more, and Barney and Pomp were safely landed on the deck.

Two happier men than they were when they felt the deck of The Queen Clipper of the Clouds under their feet again it would have been difficult to find.

Barney embraced Frank, Jr., in the exuberance of his joy, and Pomp danced an impromptu breakdown to show his delight.

As the balloon would only be an encumbrance, it was then cast adrift. The course of the air-ship was resumed, and the balloon was soon left behind and lost to sight in the distance.

Then it became necessary to consider what disposition should be made of the remains of the dead aeronauts.

It was decided to make a landing on the prairie, and bury the two unfortunate men, and then from

the first favorable point send the news of their sad fate and their papers home to their friends.

Accordingly the propellers were stopped, and the suspensory helices were gradually slowed up so as to allow the air-ship to float slowly downward.

As there was no high wind, a landing was easily made, and then, as the magnificent aerial craft came to rest on the broad bosom of the verdant plains, it was seen how admirably the elastic springs obviated all concussion. These spirals under the hull yielded gently, and the ship came to rest without a jar.

The anchor was not needed, as the character of the surface gave a good resting-place for the vessel.

The powerful currents were all turned off, and the entire crew went on land. The two dead aeronauts' remains were carried from the vessel, and the men set to work with the necessary tools, which were found on the air vessel, to dig their graves on the lone prairie.

It was not far from a water-course which was fringed with timber that the air-ship made its landing.

The spot selected for the double grave was distant about a hundred yards from the resting-place of The Queen Clipper of the Clouds, where the soil seemed to be of a yielding character.

Profound silence brooded over the plains, broken only by the sound of running water in the stream and the melancholy sighing of the gentle night breeze among the trees on its banks.

No one of the crew dreamt that there was a single human creature save themselves within many miles of the isolated place.

Thus it came about that The Queen Clipper of the Clouds was left unguarded while all went to attend the solemn night burial.

But human beings of the sort most dangerous to the safety of the air-ship and her crew, as well as to all honest men, were near, though in concealment.

Under cover of the timber along the water course a band of a score of border desperadoes, road-agents, train wreckers and horse thieves had encamped, and they had watched the approach of the air-ship in fear and awe until they saw her land, and discovered that her crew were only men and a small party at that.

Seeing the crew leave the strange craft, the desperadoes marked it for their prey, rightly concluding it would afford them rich plunder.

"We'll creep up and take possession of the queer machine, lads, while the owners are away, and lay in ambush for them on their own craft when they come on board again. Then we'll capture 'em all an' make a short shift of 'em," said a stalwart, bearded ruffian, who was the chief of the lawless band.

His plan was fully approved.

At once the outlaws set about carrying it into execution.

Stealthily as redskins creeping upon an unsuspecting white foe when they advanced through the prairie grass which concealed their bodies. Like serpents they crawled on and on toward the air-ship.

Meantime Frank Reade, Jr., suddenly discovered that Smith Brown, although he had left the air vessel with the others, was now missing.

"Well, it doesn't matter. I suppose he has taken it into his head to go back to the ship," said the young inventor to the doctor.

"He seems to be an eccentric sort of a fellow, anyhow. Did you notice his strange conduct and language when the balloon escaped with Barney and Pomp?" Frank, Jr., added.

"Yes, I did observe that he seemed unduly excited, and that his manner was wild. However, he seems to be an excellent, faithful hand," replied the doctor.

Frank Reade, Jr., had hit upon the truth when he decided that Smith Brown had taken the notion to go back to the air-ship.

Such was the fact.

Smith Brown had quietly slipped away from the others when the work of digging the dead aeronauts' graves commenced.

He crept toward The Queen Clipper of the Clouds, pausing every few steps to glance backward at his comrades, as though he feared they might discover his desertion.

"Ah-ha! Shall a mere boy like this Frank Reade, Jr., win success where I, Professor Leonidas Wickersham, have failed after devoting a life-time to the study of aerostatics? Never! All the air demons are with me. I shall triumph. Alone I will seize the air-ship; alone I believe I can navigate her, for I've the plan well matured. Ah-ha! I'll fly over the wide ocean and astonish the old world. All the scientists of Europe shall do homage to me, and I shall be king of the air."

Muttering in this wild strain, the insane inventor crept on.

Meantime the digging of the graves was proceeding with.



But suddenly there came a startling interruption.

The alarm bell on the Queen Clipper began to ring fast and furious, and Smith Brown's voice was heard as he shouted:

"Help! help! help!"

Then through the uncertain light Frank, Jr., saw the deck of his air-ship thronged with strange, dark forms.

#### CHAPTER VII.

##### A BATTLE FOR POSSESSION OF THE AIR-SHIP.

The consternation of Frank Reade, Jr., and his

great achievements?" replied Dr. Vaneyke in a tone of unutterable disappointment and regret.

"No!" responded Frank Reade, Jr., with determination. "It must not be! I will never give up the ship. Men, are you with me for a desperate venture to recapture our wonderful craft?"

"We are! We are!" came the enthusiastic response.

To a man the inventor's crew were resolved to stand by him, and follow him to the rescue of the great air-ship.

"Then we will improve every second. Now to cover!"

Frank dashed for the fringe of timber on the

Clipper from the other side, if the outlaws fall into our trap and leave the ship."

"Excellent!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Gollie, I'se de coon to work de game. I'se gwine to do some head work to fool dem white trash too," said the ducky.

Pomp was a dead shot with the rifle, and brave as a lion when on terra firma. Frank knew he could be relied on to do his part.

"Begob, it's a bit av a ruction we'll have if the blackguards lave any wan on the ship. Sure an' it's a happy mon I am. Many's the day since I've had a bit av diversion wid the shifflah!" cried Barney, delighted at the prospect of a fight.



The fugitive settler needed no injunction to make haste. His wife and children were in the wagon, and the honest pioneer was seeking to save the loved ones, who were dearer to him than his own life.

comrades when, through the moonlight, they beheld the deck of the Queen Clipper of the Clouds thronged with strange dark forms, as they heard the clang of the alarm bell and Smith Brown's shouts for help, was indescribable.

The young inventor and his men were completely surprised. But they comprehended the situation almost upon the instant, and Frank, Jr., exclaimed excitedly:

"Those fellows on the air-ship are no doubt a band of prairie outlaws. They must have been concealed in the adjacent timber when we made a landing."

"And they evidently greatly outnumber us. That they mean to plunder and destroy the ship may be assumed. Is the wonderful apparatus to be lost thus at the very commencement of your

bank of the stream. The others followed his lead, and in a moment all were out of the sight of the outlaws on the air-ship under the trees.

"Now then," said Frank, as he halted just beyond the edge of the timber, "we can only hope to retake The Queen Clipper by a stratagem, and I have thought of a plan. This stream and the fringe of timber run east and west. At one point it passes the air-ship, which is about one hundred yards west of this point. Very good. We have two repeating rifles with us. The doctor and I Reade, Jr., and the doctor armed themselves in like manner. It was a time of suspense and intense excitement. Everything depended upon the outlaws being drawn to Pomp's ambush. But let us see what had actually taken place on board of The Queen Clipper.

Frank gave Pomp some hurried final instructions, and then he led the way along through the timber, and the ducky was left alone with the two repeating rifles.

As Frank, Jr., and his companions went through the woods the fact became known that Sands, the chief engineer, had a revolver with him, and that Blake, the helmsman, was armed in like manner. Hall carried a huge dirk knife, Barney secured a heavy oak club as they went along, and Frank and the doctor armed themselves in like manner.

It was a time of suspense and intense excitement. Everything depended upon the outlaws being drawn to Pomp's ambush.

But let us see what had actually taken place on board of The Queen Clipper.



The prairie outlaws had reached the air-ship ahead of Smith Brown, and they were concealed on the deck—crouching in the deep shadows of the cabins—when the lunatic came on board, bent upon his insane project of stealing the wonderful vessel.

The outlaws wished, of course, to make Smith Brown a prisoner without allowing him to give his companions the alarm.

Suddenly two of them sprang upon him and a blow was aimed at the head of the insane professor that would have felled him senseless to the deck if it had hit him. But a sound made by his assailants caused Smith Brown to leap aside, and

aw chief started at once with the remainder of his command to run down Frank Reade, Jr.

The outlaws charged across the prairie toward the cover at the point where the crew of the Queen Clipper had entered the timber. As they advanced they uttered fierce yells and the chief loudly called on the strangers to come out and give themselves up, or they would all be butchered. But this did not intimidate Pomp in the least.

The black dead shot had been in too many desperate conflicts with savage men to be frightened thus.

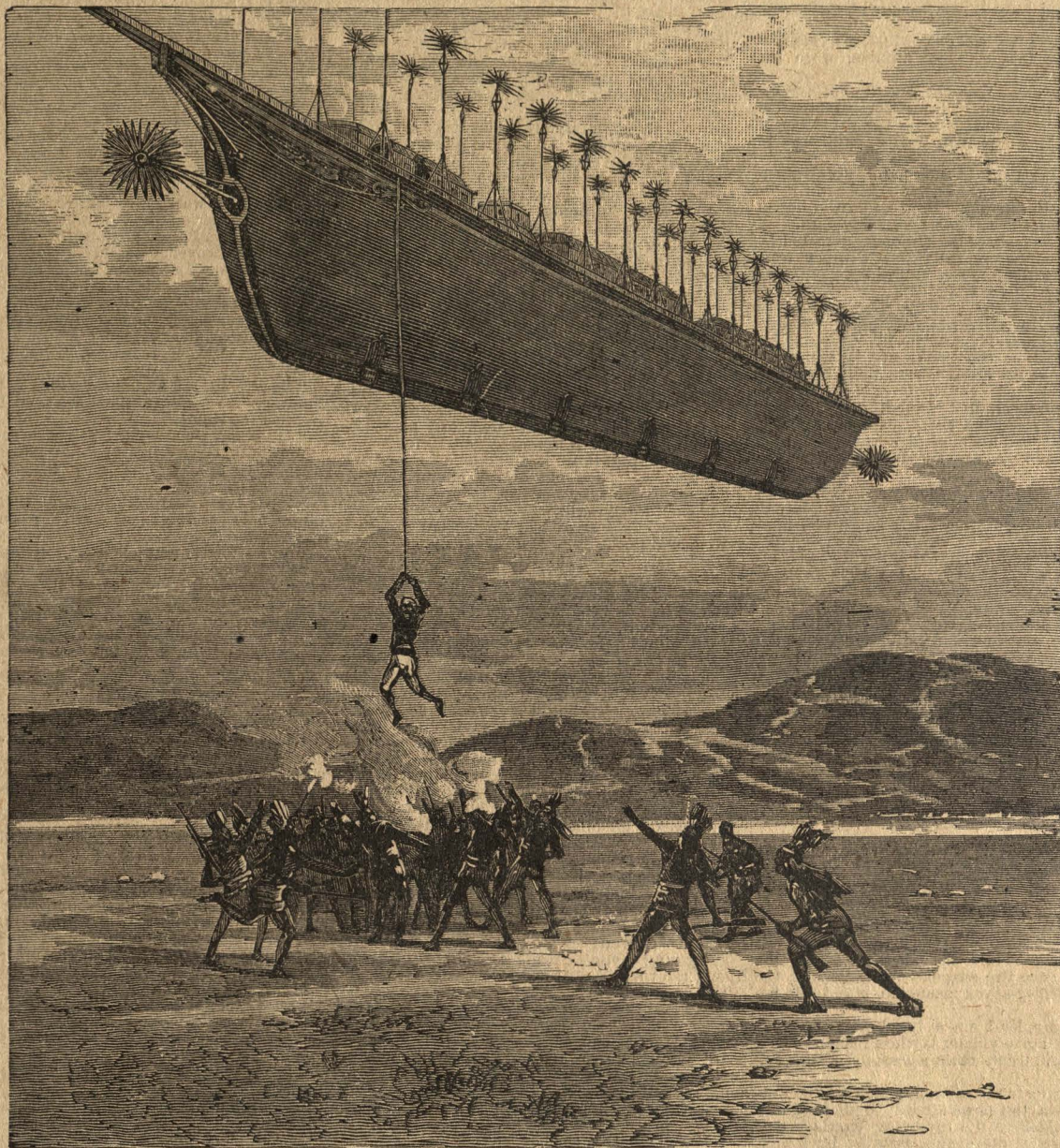
The brave, reckless ducky had now got everything in readiness for business. He had placed

make terms. I done reckon dat ready cash am wuff mo' to youns dan our ship."

The cupidity of the outlaw chief was at once aroused upon hearing this, and he ordered a halt. Pomp could not have hit upon anything better to say to gain his ends.

"Well, what will you give if we let you have the ship, and spare your lives? But hold on! You're a nigger! Surely you ain't the captain of the flyin' outfit?" replied the outlaw leader.

"Dat's jess what I is, sah. You'se got yah eyes onter de great Captain Pomp G. Washington John-sing, B. A., inventor and colored millionaire," replied Pomp, with wonderful dignity.



The amazed and enraged savages leaped upward, making frantic efforts to seize Pomp. But he was whisked beyond their reach. The Indians yelled and discharged their weapons at Pomp as he was carried skyward at the end of the rope which was attached to the air-ship.

he did not receive the intended blow. He saw the two outlaws and then he bounded to the bow-cabin and began to ring the alarm bell violently and shout for help, as we have seen. In that moment of personal peril his insane project was forgotten. But Smith Brown was quickly overpowered, for the outlaws, seeing that their plan to take the crew of the air-ship by surprise when they returned had failed, thronged from their hiding places.

Smith Brown was bound hand and foot and thrust into the center cabin.

The outlaws had no further motive to attempt concealment, and they were naturally inclined to pursue Frank Reade, Jr., and his party when they saw them beat a retreat to the timber.

Leaving six men to guard the air-ship the out-

laws the two repeating rifles at a convenient rest upon a fallen tree, whose branches afforded the desired hold, and he could kneel behind the log and discharge both rifles at the same time, working a trigger with each hand.

"I'se got de masked battery all ready fer action when de time comes fer ter let her go. But de time ain't come yit. Now I'se gwine fo' to git in some headwork," said Pomp to himself, as he saw the outlaws charging from the air-ship.

With this he pulled a large white pocket-handkerchief out of his pocket and tied it on to the end of a long stick, which he found at hand.

Waving this impromptu flag of truce, Pomp advanced out of the timber, and called out to the outlaws:

"Hold on, dar. We must hab a talk. Maybe we

"Well, then, I'll tell you what, my high-toned coon. I'll take ten thousand shiners if you have 'em, an' pull out with my gang, an' leave you an' yer flyin' outfit uninjured," said the outlaw.

"All right. Dat's putty steep, but I can't lose dat air-ship nohow. Jess wait till I go back in de wood whar I done hid all de money, an' I'll bring you de dollars in a moment, sah."

"Be mighty quick then, Mr. Coon, or the boys will git tired of waitin'," replied the outlaw.

"Gollie, I guess I done gained all de time I kin fer Mars Frank by workin' head work, an' so now I'se ready to throw lead inter dem mean, low-down rapsallions, fer keeps. Dar's gwine to be a Fourth ob July celebration broke loose mighty sudden!" said Pomp, as he hastened back into the woods.

In a moment he took his place between the two



repeating rifles, and with his fingers on the triggers he waited for the onset of the outlaws which he knew would soon come.

And while he waited for the attack Pomp listened almost breathlessly for the sound that would tell him Frank Reade, Jr., and his comrades had gained the air-ship.

Some moments elapsed that were periods of suspense for Pomp.

Then the outlaws, becoming impatient and suspecting that they had been tricked rushed forward.

Instantly Pomp opened fire with the two sixteen shooters. Like lightning the black rifleman worked the triggers of his two rifles, sending a rattling volley of bullets hurtling among the charging outlaws.

The marauders fell back in confusion before that deadly fire, and four of their number were left dead on the field.

Almost at the same moment that the outlaws began to retreat Pomp heard the report of firearms and loud shouts emanating from the direction of the air-ship. He knew then that a fight was in progress there.

Then clutching a rifle in each hand, Pomp ran at full speed along the edge of the timber until he came opposite the air-ship; then he darted out of the woods and made straight for the air-ship.

Now, the main body of the outlaws, attracted by the sounds of conflict on the Queen Clipper were rushing back to the support of the six men they had left on board the aerial craft.

But Frank Reade, Jr., and his party had taken those outlaws by surprise. Creeping silently through the tall prairie grass the inventor and his men had come from the woods and boarded the Queen Clipper at the stern before they were discovered.

Then a desperate conflict ensued.

Sands and Blake fired their revolvers at short range. Hall wielded his huge dirk knife furiously, and Frank Reade, Jr., and the doctor battled valiantly.

It was a hand to hand struggle between the six outlaws and the crew of the air-ship, and while all behaved admirably, Barney fairly surpassed himself.

"Whoop! Erin-go-brah! Down wid the blackguards av the world!" shouted the fearless Irishman, and he charged recklessly upon the outlaws, laying about him lustily.

In less than a moment Barney had brained two of the outlaws, a third had been shot through the heart by Sands, a fourth had fallen under Hall's knife, and the other three were driven overboard before the clubs of Frank Reade, Jr., and the doctor. Sands, Barney and Hall were all wounded, but not seriously.

As the three outlaws were driven from the deck Pomp arrived.

But now the main body of the outlaws were close at hand, and it seemed that the terrible conflict must be renewed.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A MYSTERY ON BOARD THE QUEEN CLIPPER.

"EVERY man to his post!" shouted Frank Reade, Jr. "We must get aloft instantly!"

The engineers sprang to the several cabins. The helmsman rushed into his glass house in the stern, and at once the suspensory helices at the heads of the thirty-seven mast-like standards began to spin.

"Come, Pomp, lend me a hand with the field-piece, and we'll give yonder lawless rascals such a reception as will teach them a lesson," Frank, Jr., added.

Then he sprang to the cannon, which was mounted on a pivot in the bows already loaded. Pomp put his shoulder to the revolving carriage that supported the field-piece, and, assisted by Frank, Jr., and the doctor, swung it around until it was trained on the outlaws.

Then as the Queen Clipper of the clouds began to rise under the impetus of the helices that now revolved at lightning speed, Frank Reade, Jr., discharged the field-piece.

The loud detonation reverberated over the plain, and a chorus of fearful yells from the outlaws was blended with the report. A cloud of powder smoke hung for a moment between the air-ship and its enemies, but when this presently lifted the surviving outlaws were seen running in every direction, while a number were left dead on the plain.

The Queen Clipper of the Clouds soared steadily upward as gracefully as a bird, and soon reached an elevation of five hundred feet.

Then the propelling screws were set in motion, and Frank, Jr., gave the steersman his course.

All danger being now passed, as the ship sailed away upon the air, Pomp sang tauntingly, for the discomfiture of the outlaws:

"Our ship goes sailing down de bay, good-bye, my lover, good-bye."

After releasing Smith Brown, who said that he had returned alone to the air-ship, because he feared he had forgotten to set one of the levers of the stern screw machine properly, Frank, Jr., and the doctor inspected the vessel.

The young inventor and his old friend were much gratified to learn that the outlaws had not damaged the vessel in any way during the period they were in possession.

But some little time later, Frank, Jr., bethought himself that it was time to renew one of the electric piles and test the accumulators.

Since the composition of these was the fundamental secret of the wonderful air-ship, known only to himself, Frank descended alone to the battery-room, under the central turret.

The young inventor was busy among his chemicals for some time in that strange room, which resembled the den of some mysterious alchemist of olden times.

He had about completed the task he had to accomplish there when he suddenly heard a sound at the door of the battery-room.

Frank, Jr., fancied some one was there, and crossing the room he seized the knob to throw the door open suddenly.

But the door did not yield.

The young inventor was astounded. Surely it appeared that some one had fastened him in the battery-room.

Listening intently he was sure he heard stealthy footsteps moving away from the door.

Then he exerted all his strength to force open the door. In a moment or two it yielded, and Frank, Jr., passed out of the battery room and saw that a box had been wedged against the door.

But no one was to be seen. The delay which Frank had been compelled to make in opening the door had enabled the person who had placed the obstruction against it to escape undetected.

"Can it be that there is any one on board who wants to steal the secret of my chemicals?" the young inventor asked himself.

And then he thought:

"No one could steal that knowledge unless he was learned in the science of chemistry."

Frank, Jr., did not think there was any one on board the air-ship save the doctor and himself who understood chemical science.

And so he was very much troubled and perplexed by this incident.

Great would have been the inventor's astonishment if he could have seen behind him a few moments before he heard the sound at the door of the battery-room that attracted his attention. Then he would have seen Smith Brown crouching just outside the door, which he held ajar. He would have observed too, that Smith Brown's eyes blazed with eager light, that his pale face shook with the tremor of undue nervous excitement, and that he watched his every movement as a cat might watch a mouse, noting the while, by means of a pencil upon a card which he held in his hand, the labels of the bottles of chemicals Frank used.

The insane professor braced the box against the door of the battery-room with the cunning of insanity, thus insuring a delay on the inventor's part, which could not otherwise have been brought about.

Frank, Jr., went on deck and found the doctor. The young inventor made a confidant of his old friend, relating all that had just occurred.

"You quite surprise me. Who can the spy be? Really I can think of no one upon whom suspicion can rest," said the doctor.

"That's what worries me. If there is a man on board who is plotting to steal my secrets he is my enemy, and the mystery is entirely beyond my ken," replied Frank, Jr.

Just then Barney came up and said respectfully:

"If ye plaze, sur, the box we took out av the lost balloon hasn't been opened yet. Sure an' I'm after thinkin' maybe you would like to have it opened now."

"Yes," assented Frank, Jr. "It may be well to open the box. Perhaps it contains something that should be sent to the dead aeronaut's friends. Get a chisel, Barney, and we will see what the box contains. We shall have to break the lock."

Barney hastened to bring the required implement from a tool-chest in the bow-cabin, where Blake was taking charge of the bow-screw machinery just then.

The dead aeronaut's box was still on deck, and not without some difficulty was the lid forced. But Barney finally got it open.

The box was found to contain astronomical charts, some spirits, and three books on ballooning, one of which was a large and well illustrated volume.

Nothing of importance was found in the chest.

Frank Reade, Jr., ordered Barney to store it away in the bow-cabin, and the Irishman did so.

He mentioned to Blake, who inquired as to the contents of the chest, that it contained some "mighty fine pictur' books."

After the contents of the aeronaut's chest had been inspected, Frank and the doctor conversed further about the mystery of the spy. The young inventor said:

"I've an idea the fellow, whosoever he is, will try to explore the battery room slyly yet, if he has not already done so, and I propose to set a trap for him."

Frank, Jr., went on to explain his plan and half an hour later he made his way down to the battery room, as he thought, unobserved by any one save the doctor.

But Pomp saw his young master, and his stealthy manner aroused the curiosity of the darky. He resolved to keep his eyes and ears open and find out what was going on.

After a while Frank, Jr., came upon the deck again and said to the doctor, in a low tone without observing Pomp, who stood within earshot, in the shadow of the center cabin:

"I've fixed the knob of the door to the battery room so that a wire runs from it, on the inside, to the battery. Now any one who opens or attempts to open the door, by means of the knob, will get a shock that I'll warrant to force a yell from him no matter how anxious he is to avoid detection."

Hearing this Pomp went into the cook's galley with a grin all over his face.

"Gollie, now I done put up a job on dat Irishman. I owe him one, anyhow, an' now am de time to got even," reflected Pomp.

Barney came into the cook-house presently, and with an air of great mystery, Pomp said:

"I done tole yer a secret, if yer don't gib me away."

"Be gob, an' is it so mane as that ye think I am? Faith, an' it's smackin' the gob av yez I'll be doin', if I had me rights."

"It's about whisky dat I've got de secret."

"Whisky, is it! Arrah! Pomp, sure it's a gentleman ye are. I was only aither jokin' wid yer."

"Well, den, I heard Mars Frank say he put a jug ob de bess ole rye in de little room under de center cabin."

"Whist! Sayniver a word. Sure an' we'll have a taste av the same," said Barney, and he left the cook's galley. Pomp laughed silently in anticipation of the fun. A few moments elapsed. Then suddenly a terrible yell came up from below deck, and a moment later the maddest Irishman that ever was seen came up from the battery-room.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE AIR-SHIP IN A STORM—THE TRAIN WRECKERS.

FRANK READE, JR., and the doctor were on the alert to hear the yell of the person who might get a shock from the knob of the battery-room door.

They heard Barney's outcry, and they ran to the companion way, and saw the enraged Irishman as he came on deck.

"Where is the nagur? Bad seran till the loikes av him. Sure an' I'll bate the head av him!" roared Barney, and he made for the cook's galley.

"Stop!" sternly cried Frank, confronting him.

Barney paused, and Frank continued, severely:

"You have been where you had no business."

"Sure, master, dear, it was all the fault av the nagur. He sint me ather some ould red eye that he was tellin' av me was in the bathery room."

"And you got a shock!"

"Shock, is it? Sure, an' it's blowed up wid dynamite I wuz."

"Let it teach you not to try to steal liquor again."

"It will that. But begob, I'll kill the nagur, so I will."

"Pomp must have overheard us," said Frank to the doctor.

Just then a hearty "yah, yah, yah!" came from the cook's galley. It was a genuine darky laugh. Pomp had heard all, and he could not restrain his mirth any longer.

"Whoop! I'll make yez laugh atnother tune. Begob, an' it's me loife yez was af her takin'!" roared Barney.

Then off came his coat, and he began to prance toward Pomp with his hands up in fighting style.

"Keep yer close on, man!" cried Pomp, tauntingly.

"Sure, an' I'll bate the rags off of yez."

"Better hire a couple ob cheap han's to help yer."

"Begob, an Irishman never nades any help to bate a nagur."

"Keep off dar. I've got iron in my blood, sah, an' I've bad when I've mad."

But Barney was spoiling for a fight.

He did not heed Pomp's warning, though perhaps it would have been better for him if he had done so.

Straight at Pomp he rushed. But the butting



darkly was on the alert to receive him. All at once he ducked his huge round head, and it shot forward like a black cannon ball.

Too late Barney retreated. Pomp's head caught him below the belt, and he was knocked out of time in short order.

Barney shut up like a jack-knife with an electric spring in the middle, and when he got up he didn't feel like fighting quite as much as he did.

"Sure, an' if yez dared foight like a gentleman, be gob, it's a wake I'd be flixin' yez for. But, in troth, it's like a hathen nagur yez be's, always rushin' yer cast-iron head at a mon," said Barney, ruefully, as he picked himself up.

Pomp retired into the cook-house laughing, and Barney went to relieve Blake at the bow-screw engine, mentally vowing he would play a joke on Pomp yet that would more than square their accounts up to date.

The wonderful aerial vessel sailed on grandly.

The weather continued favorable, and all enjoyed the delightful voyage. Frank, Jr., kept the Queen Clipper so near the earth that the wonderful scenery of the grand picturesque western land over which they were passing could be seen.

The voyage was a constant succession of magnificent views.

The third day toward nightfall Frank, Jr.'s, observation of the barometer and storm-glass informed him that certain remarkable changes were taking place in the atmosphere that presaged storm and tempest.

The barometer went down several degrees in a few moments; vapor disappeared from the air: large clouds massed themselves in the depths of the copper-colored sky.

The squall broke suddenly.

First came a little puff or two of wind as if the tempest was drawing breath, and then the full volume of the gale burst upon the air-ship.

She was riding at an elevation of about eight hundred feet. The first gust sent her careening dangerously on one side; the suspensory helices, grinding by the contact of their bases unevenly, sent out unearthly shrieks, and the hurricane threatened the destruction of the air-ship.

Frank Reade, Jr., was cool and composed in the midst of the peril. He saw that the course of the storm was for a lower level.

"Put on more speed! We must rise above the storm!" cried the young inventor.

The chief-engineer threw back the levers to the last notch, and the suspensory helices revolved with the velocity of lightning. Electric sparks flew in showers from their bases and The Queen Clipper of the Clouds shot upward like a rocket.

The ascent carried the vessel far above the storm in an almost incredibly short space. The vessel's ascent was checked at an elevation of some thirty-four hundred feet, and at that height she sailed onward until she was out of the range of the storm that raged below.

The peril passed, Doctor Vaneyke complimented Frank, Jr., warmly on the manner in which his wonderful vessel obeyed her machinery.

The next morning, as the air-ship was sailing about five hundred feet above the earth, Frank Jr., through his field glass, saw the line of a railway on the plains below.

He knew it must be the Northern Pacific Railroad, and descending until the vessel was only about two hundred feet above the plain, the helmsman was instructed to follow the course of the railway westward.

Not long after that Dr. Vaneyke called Frank, Jr.'s attention to the fact that a number of small objects could be discerned upon the railway track, afar in the western direction.

The young inventor brought a telescope of great magnifying power to bear upon the objects the doctor had discovered, and presently he announced:

"What you saw are men."

"Men! And what are they doing on this remote part of the railway line?" asked the doctor.

"They seem to be at work. Owing to the distance I cannot tell just what they are doing, though I presume they are a band of track-men repairing the line."

"No doubt," assented the doctor.

But as the vessel sailed on westward Frank, Jr., continued to watch the men through his glass.

As he drew nearer he suddenly uttered a surprised exclamation and lowered the glass.

"What is it? What have you discovered now?" the doctor asked.

"That the men on the track yonder are not railway employees. No, they are a band of train-wreckers, and they are heaping rocks on the track. Where they are, the road goes through a little stony ridge.

"The wretches! They may cause the loss of many precious lives," said the doctor.

"I don't mean to let them wreck a train."

"Your hand. That's like you, Frank. Always on the side of the right," said the doctor.

"There are some twenty odd of the rascals, and they are a desperate-looking set, armed to the teeth."

"But we shall have to fight them."

"Certainly, and we'll drive them off, too, if all goes well."

"Foight, is it? Arrah, it's meself as is on hand for a ruction. Drop me down among the blackguards wid me shillalah, an' begob I'll be tachin' thim what it is to be struck wid an Irish cyclone! Drop me down, masher dear," cried Barney, who was standing by.

"No. This must be a fight at long range," replied Frank, Jr.

"By Jupiter, Frank! Look yonder to the east. See the smoke of an engine coming westward! That's the California express, and unless we drive off the train wreckers and clear the track the train is doomed!" cried Doctor Vaneyke.

"Sands can run the ship ahead alone for a short time! All hands to arms!" cried Frank.

There was a rack of rifles in the center cabin. Each man secured one, and all stood ready to open fire on the train wreckers in a moment. The wreckers had sighted the air-ship, and were getting ready to fight. Frank and the doctor manned the field piece, and when the Queen Clipper was within about a hundred feet of the train wreckers the propellers were shut off and the ship remained stationary at a low elevation. Then the crew of the air-ship discharged a volley at the train wreckers, and they with fierce yells returned it.

In a moment a hot battle was raging.

Meantime the approaching Western bound train was drawing nearer, and the issue of the conflict was in uncertainty.

Would Frank Reade, Jr., succeed in saving the train?

## CHAPTER X.

### THE DEFEAT OF THE TRAIN WRECKERS—THE GREAT PRAIRIE FIRE.

THE train wreckers made a desperate stand, and the bullets flew thick and fast around the crew of the Queen Clipper of the Clouds.

But the fusillade of rifle balls from the air-ship and the discharge of grape shot from the cannon, made severe havoc among the desperadoes, and they presently began to fall back.

Meanwhile the approaching railway train was still coming on at full speed, and, owing to a sharp curve through some low, wooded hills, it appeared that the engineer could not have as yet sighted the train wreckers or the air-ship.

When the desperadoes began to retreat Frank, Jr., immediately ordered the great fore and aft propelling screws to be started, and this command being promptly obeyed, the Queen Clipper of the Clouds pursued the lawless band.

A steady firing was kept up on the deck of the air-ship the while, and Pomp and Barney did excellent service with their rifles. But the black dead shot distinguished himself above all others. Pomp brought down an outlaw every time he discharged his weapon.

The fight was a source of great delight to the jolly Irishman, and as the train wreckers began to retreat, he shouted:

"Run, ye mutherin' blackguards! Git, ye thaves av the worruld! Faith an' it's an Irishman yez are foighin' this toime, an' it's batin' the heads av yez he wud be afther doin' if he was in reach av yez!"

"Dat's all right, Barney. But de Irish ain't doin' all de fightin' in dis yere battle. No, sah! De colored population am right on de top notch in dis yere scrimmage, an' doan' you cease ter recollect dat," put in Pomp, who was inclined to be jealous of his fame.

The pursuit of the outlaws was continued by the air-ship until the former finally broke, and fled to the shelter of an adjacent woods completely routed.

Meantime the train went thundering by the place where the outlaws had intended to cause the wreck. The few slight obstructions which the wreckers had succeeded in placing upon the track, before The Queen Clipper of the Clouds came down upon them, were not sufficient to derail the train, and they were swept aside by the cowcatcher.

But the people of the train discovered the air-ship, and saw the fleeing outlaws at last in time to comprehend what had taken place and that they had been saved from a terrible calamity.

The car windows were crowded with heads and the platforms were thronged with passengers seeking to obtain a view of Frank Reade, Jr.'s, wonderful air-ship.

Cheers and hurrahs came through space to the aerial craft, and a multitude of handkerchiefs were waved enthusiastically.

Frank Reade, Jr., and his crew sent back an answering cheer, and until the train vanished in the distance the passengers could be seen watching

the wonder of the clouds, to which they owed their preservation, with deepest interest.

Then, all at once, Frank Reade, Jr., resolved to give a gratuitous exhibition and demonstrate that his latest and greatest invention surpassed, in point of speed, all known vehicles of conveyance, either by land or water.

The suspensory screws were made to spin at lightning speed, and The Queen Clipper of the Clouds swiftly ascended to the height of a thousand feet. Then the powerful currents were turned on to the machinery of the propellers, and the aerial wonder darted forward in pursuit of the train.

The speed attained was so great that even the doctor shuddered, and Pomp went down on his knees in the cook's galley, with the wool standing up straight on the top of his head in fright.

The dial that registered the rate of speed quickly indicated one hundred and twenty knots to the hour—two knots a minute.

"Heavens, Frank!" cried the doctor, in a tone of intense apprehension, "this is awful! We are going with the velocity of a cannon-ball."

"Exactly," replied the young inventor, placidly. "At this rate of speed we could make the circuit of our globe in eight days—or say two hundred hours."

The railway train was overtaken and passed. Frank Reade, Jr., ran the stars and stripes up to the head of one of the tallest masts, and a salute was fired from the cannon far above the heads of the bewildered passengers.

Then the speed was checked, and, satisfied that he had given the spectators of the train something to wonder about for the rest of their lives, Frank Reade, Jr., was content to proceed on his aerial voyage at the moderate speed previously maintained.

Toward night a descent was made in the usual manner to the prairie to take in some fresh water from a stream—a tributary of the Yellowstone—which had been sighted. The course had been northwest for some time.

Some time previously dense clouds of black smoke had been discovered ascending from the plains to the southeast.

Frank Reade, Jr., and his friends knew that a vast prairie fire was approaching, but they thought they could easily secure the supply of water they needed before the conflagration reached them.

But while the air-ship rested lightly upon the plain, and while all hands were engaged in filling one of the tanks, the wind shifted and began to blow a gale from the south-east.

Of course the prairie fire was driven toward them at racehorse speed before the high wind, and Frank, Jr., ordered all speed to be made in filling the water tank.

The men all worked as rapidly as possible, while not without some feelings of apprehension, they watched the swift advance of the devastating flames.

The red glare of the night conflagration was reflected upon the sky above a canopy of somber smoke, until the heavens glowed like a sea of blood.

Soon the smell of the burning grass filled the air and presently, through a glass, Frank Reade, Jr., made a startling discovery of a human creature in deadly peril.

The young inventor made known what he had seen, saying:

"Yonder comes an emigrant wagon fleeing before the flames. The canvas-covered vehicle contains a settler and his family!"

In a moment or so all saw the imperiled family with the naked eye. The settler was lashing his team of frightened horses forward at the top of their speed, in the frantic effort to distance the pursuing flames.

And round about the settler's wagon numerous wild animals of the plains were fleeing before the fire. There were buffalo, antelope, wolves, jack rabbits, prairie dogs, all in confusion and maddened with fright.

The scene was inexpressibly thrilling and terrible.

It became evident, almost immediately, that the settler had sighted the air-ship, and he was driving straight toward it.

Frank Reade, Jr., and his comrades wished to save the settler and his family, and the young inventor measured the relative rate of speed of the wagon and the flames with his wonderfully accurate skill and certainty of eye, and he calculated that there was a chance that the settler might reach him in time.

"Every man to his post, and be ready to set the suspensory helices revolving at the highest speed the instant you hear my order, men!" cried Frank, Jr.

At once each man of the crew took his accustomed post on the aerial vessel, and Frank and the doctor frantically signaled the settler to hasten, and they shouted to him encouragingly:



"We will save you! Keep up your heart! Run your horses to death! You will have to leave them to their fate!" cried Frank, Jr., while on came the settler's wagon and the frightened, wild animals, and nearer and nearer behind them roared the seething flames.

The fugitive settler needed no injunction to make haste. His wife and children were in the wagon, and the honest pioneer was seeking to save the loved ones, who were dearer to him than his own life.

Frank, Jr. and the doctor could see the frightened mother, white-faced and terrified, crouching in the wagon behind her husband, while her little children clung to her skirts, crying in alarm, though they were almost too young to realize all the awful danger that so nearly menaced them.

For a moment the suspense of the scene was painful even to the spectators on the air-ship.

"Will he reach us in time? Ought we not to sail to him?" said the doctor.

"He will reach us. To sail toward him would now be to lose in making the necessary ascent and subsequent descent, the valuable time upon which the settler's salvation depends," replied Frank.

The doctor looked a trifle doubtful, but so great was his confidence in Frank Reade, Jr., that he was well nigh reassured.

The settler's wagon drew nearer every second, and at last the over-taxed horses fell and were unable to rise again. But now the fugitives had almost reached The Queen Clipper of the Clouds and the settler and his family sprang from their wagon and rushed forward to the air-ship.

Frank Reade, Jr. and the doctor assisted them on board, and then the young inventor shouted the order to ascend, while the hot breath of the flames, now almost upon him, scorched his face.

#### CHAPTER XI.

##### AN UNSEEN FOE—FRANK READE, JR., IN DEADLY PERIL.

As the wondrous power of the giant electric currents from the accumulators, transmitted to the machinery by the swift manipulation of the levers, sent the suspensory helices revolving instantly with the voice of a thousand shuttles, like a thing of life suddenly vivified by the wand of a magician, The Queen Clipper darted skyward.

Cp, up, like some mighty bird of passage setting out upon a long flight the air-ship soared into the blue ethereal vault of measureless space.

And with a roar like the ocean, storm-lashed and terrible, the conflagration swept over the late resting place of the aerial ship, licking up every living thing with its red tongues of flame, and sending fiery serpents of fire upward as if in pursuit of the sky voyagers amid a black canopy of smoke billows.

But The Queen Clipper of the Clouds was beyond the reach of the conflagration in a moment, and under the propelling power of the fore and aft screws it sailed onward.

And the settler clasped his wife and children in his arms in joy at their preservation, and his gratitude to Frank Reade, Jr., found expression in heart-felt words, and then astonishment and awe held all the rescued ones speechless, as they were carried so miraculously through space.

Frank, Jr., smiled as he observed the amazement, not unmingled with trepidation, depicted upon the faces of the settler's family, and he hastened to reassure them by briefly explaining the situation and introducing himself.

Then the settler said he was on his way to a frontier settlement, some twenty miles to the southwest, and Frank, Jr., promised to convey him safely to his destination.

This he did, and having seen the rescued family landed among their friends at the prairie hamlet where they meant to make a new home, the aerial ship resumed its voyage through the sea of space above our earth.

Meantime, since the episode of the attempted capture of the Queen Clipper, Smith Brown had kept aloof from the other members of Frank Reade's crew as much as possible.

The insane inventor and scientist was in a sullen, brooding mood that certainly presaged future danger for the air-ship.

In his unsettled brain the maniac was developing such a terrible and desperate plot as only could have found its inception in such a mind as his.

Alone at his post in the stera engine-house, Smith Brown muttered his thoughts in soliloquy unheard by human ears.

In thus formulating his dread project he seemed to find all the pleasure to be derived from the anticipation of a future triumph over Frank Reade, Jr., for whom he had conceived a fierce, jealous hatred.

"Ha!" mused the insane conspirator, "if Frank Reade, Jr., and the old doctor were out of the way I could easily make myself the captain of the air-

ship. The crew would be compelled to make a virtue of necessity and obey me, for I am the only one among them who has the scientific knowledge necessary to fill the places of Frank Reade, Jr., and the doctor. I believe I have at last succeeded in securing the secret of the piles and accumulators, though I narrowly escaped discovery while watching the young inventor at his work in the battery-room. Yes, my first step looking to the final capture of the Queen Clipper of the Clouds must be to get rid of the leading spirits of the expedition—Frank Reade, Jr., and his friend, Doctor Vaneyke. And I will succeed. Mankind shall yet hail Professor Leonidas Wickersham the king of the clouds."

The ensuing night was dark and favorable to the execution of the maniac's terrible project.

At ten o'clock Frank Reade, Jr. retired to his cabin, having first given orders that the electric light should be kept burning all night.

Dr. Vaneyke preceded the young inventor in retiring. The deck of the air-ship seemed to be deserted, for the various members of the crew were at their several posts or resting, while waiting to go on duty as relief.

The Queen Clipper was making very moderate speed before a gentle breeze. The night was sultry at that height, and the close atmosphere seemed to presage a storm.

Frank Reade, Jr., sought his couch without disturbing, and he soon fell asleep. But his slumbers did not last for long. He awoke suddenly from a troubled dream, and it was in vain that he thereafter courted sleep. He was unaccountably restless and nervous, and at length, after tossing about on his couch for a long time, he arose and went on deck.

Then, to his surprise, he found the deck in complete darkness. Contrary to his orders the electric light had been extinguished.

Some few moments previously Smith Brown had been crouching at the locked door of the young inventor's cabin.

The insane inventor heard Frank Reade, Jr., preparing to come on deck, and then he glided silently away, his burning eyes glaring like a tiger cat's in the darkness.

Smith Brown crept to the deck and made his way to the roof of the center cabin, and immediately turned off the electric light completely.

Then, with the greatest stealthiness of movements, he made his way back to the companion-way, and crouched down there to wait for Frank Reade, Jr.

The maniac had decided that the time had come to rid himself of the young man whom he hated with such insane malignity.

Presently he heard the footsteps of his intended victim, and a moment subsequently he made a cat-like forward leap and caught the young inventor by the throat.

The young inventor's throat was crushed between the muscular fingers of his insane assailant, and he was unable to utter a sound, much less cry out for help.

But Frank Reade, Jr., struggled desperately with his unseen foe, regarding whose identity he was entirely ignorant.

Vain, however, were all his efforts to release himself. Smith Brown clung to his throat with a most tenacious grip, and begun to drag him toward the rail.

The terrible conviction came to Frank, Jr.'s, mind that his antagonist meant to throw him overboard—to cause his death in a frightful manner.

And he struggled yet more frantically to free himself. Still he was unsuccessful, and nearer and nearer to the rail his hidden antagonist forced him.

Frank Reade, Jr., had never met with as terrible an experience as this, though his life had been a most eventful one, and full of thrilling adventures.

He could not breathe, and he felt his strength failing, while he realized in awful horror that his senses were deserting him.

And the rail was almost reached, when his adversary stumbled over some object on the deck.

Still he did not relax his clutch upon the young inventor's throat.

A moment of awful suspense ensued for Frank Reade, Jr., and then he felt himself lifted bodily from the deck as he came in contact with the rail.

The young owner of the air-ship at that instant of most intense peril fully believed that he was about to be hurled to his death down—down through a thousand feet of space.

But the decree of destiny was adverse to the maniac's fiendish purpose. He did not know what the object over which he had stumbled was, but at that thrilling crisis the object became endowed with motion. It was Pomp.

The darky had found the cook's galley too warm, and he had come out on the deck and laid down beside the rail and fallen asleep.

Pomp was immediately awakened, and, as the crazy inventor was about to hurl Frank Reade,

Jr., overboard, the darky leaped up and hurled them both backward from the rail. Smith Brown staggered and released his hold upon Frank, Jr., who fell heavily at Pomp's feet. Realizing that he was defeated, the mad professor glided away upon the instant and vanished in the gloom.

"Help! help!" gasped Frank, Jr., and recognizing his voice, Pomp exclaimed:

"It's Massa Frank!"

And the devoted black man fell down upon his knees and raised the young inventor in his arms, while he shouted:

"Ho dar, Barney! A light—a light, quick! Somebody has done gone killed Mars Frank!"

Barney heard, and rushing from the bow cabin, he at once turned on the electric light. But by that time Smith Brown was at his post in the stera cabin and safe from discovery.

In a few moments Frank, Jr., was revived. But the mystery on board the Queen Clipper was deeper than ever.

#### CHAPTER XII.

##### POMP CAPTURED BY INDIANS—A REMARKABLE RESCUE.

THE assault upon the young inventor occasioned the greatest excitement and consternation among the crew. There was no clue to the identity of his assailant, and all began to experience a feeling of insecurity.

The doctor hastily came on deck and Frank related his terrible experience.

"The mystery is inexplicable. Suspicion points at no one definitely, and yet, of course, common reason tells us that your cowardly foe is one of the crew," said the doctor.

"So it does," assented Frank. "But what deepens the mystery is the fact that I cannot imagine a probable motive for the assault. I have benefited every man of the crew. All are more or less under obligations to me. Why, then, should one of them seek my death? There can be no motive of revenge, and no one would profit by my demise."

"The mystery is beyond my ken," replied the doctor, in complete perplexity.

"But it must now become the purpose of my life to solve it. Why, doctor, the safety of the air-ship depends upon it, perhaps," said Frank.

And they continued to discuss the affair, but to no good purpose. There was no more sleep for any one on board The Queen Clipper of the Clouds that night.

The next morning Doctor Vaneyke said to Frank: "I would like to visit the parks of the Yellowstone and obtain some specimens of the wonderful volcanic rock formations to be found in that region."

"All right, you shall do so. But we shall have to be on the lookout for the redskins, you know the Sioux Indians are hostile just now, and they would no doubt like nothing better than a chance to scalp us all," replied Frank.

Then he gave the helmsman a new course, and the air-ship took its majestic flight for the upper Yellowstone country.

Meantime, Barney had that morning thought out a joke to play on Pomp to get even with the darky for butting him out of time.

Barney had some excellent cigars, and he said to himself:

"Be gob, an' I'll be afther sacrificin' wan av me smokers to play an old trick on the nagur, for, be the powers, I'm thinkin' it's a new wan till him."

So Barney got out the cigars and neatly perforated one, and filled it with powder about an inch from the end to be lighted.

Then, putting the prepared cigar in his pocket, he lighted one of the fragrant havanas and went into the cook's galley, where Pomp was at work.

"Gollie, Barney, datam a good cigar. You hasn't got de mate ob him wid yo', I 'speek's," said Pomp.

"Tha's what I have. Begob, only wan have I left. But you're welcome to it, me gossoon," replied Barney.

Then he gave Pomp the cigar, and the darky lighted it and began to puff away in great enjoyment.

Barney laughed inwardly and waited the progress of events, while he chatted very pleasantly. All at once the expected denouement came.

"Fizz—bang!" the cigar exploded in Pomp's mouth, and the darky let out a yell of fright and jumped about ten feet.

"Howly Moses! It was loaded!" cried Barney, roaring with laughter, and then Pomp saw it all, and he made for the Irishman with blood in his eyes.

Barney ran out on deck, and Pomp after him. All at once the Irishman dropped, and the darky went head over heels over him. But both were up in a moment, and Pomp chased Barney again.

Some one had left a trap-door—which was used to run a hose down into the water tank directly under it when the tank was being filled—open. Barney failed to see it in time, and down he went



"splash," right into the great tank full of cold water. Pomp could not stop in time to save himself, and down he went right on top of Barney, and both went down over head, sputtering and floundering comically.

Every one on deck roared as they ran and looked down into the tank. But their unexpected cold bath had cooled off the belligerent pair, and they climbed up to the deck dripping like a couple of half-drowned rats, and well nigh strangled.

A fight might have followed, but Frank, Jr., interposed and prevented it. So a temporary truce was declared, but there might be an outbreak of war between Africa and Ireland at the first favorable opportunity.

The air-ship was made to descend earthward when it was over the Yellowstone country and it proceeded at a moderate elevation, so that a good view of the grand and imposing scenery could be obtained from the deck of The Queen Clipper of the Clouds.

Finally a range of volcanic foot hills attracted the doctor's attention, and as he thought that among them he would be likely to find such geological specimens as he wished to secure, a descent was made and soon the air-ship, supported by its elastic springs, rested lightly on the earth.

As yet no Indians had been seen, but for all that they might be lurking near under cover of some adjacent timber or among the rocks. So the doctor and Frank Reade, Jr., who, with Pomp and Barney left the ship to search for mineral specimens, took the precaution to arm themselves with rifles and revolvers.

The party advanced among the hills.

The doctor was delighted and he soon began to pick up strangely colored bits of rock, and he discoursed learnedly in geological language about the specimens.

"Begob," said Barney to Pomp, "the doother's talk is all Greek till the loikes av us. Here are the tracks of two animals. One went north, the other south. Begob, let's make a try for the game. You follow the track north, an' I'll be afther takin' the other wan."

"I'll go yer," assented Pomp.

They had fallen behind Frank and the doctor, and without saying a word to them, the two reckless fellows separated, and went on the tracks of the animals.

Barney had gone some distance, when he came upon a smoldering camp-fire, and a number of moccasin-tracks about it told him that a large band of Indians had just recently been there.

"Begob, an' I don't want to part wid me hair, though me father-in-law is a wig-maker, and I'd like to make trade good for the old gent," reflected Barney, and so he beat a retreat.

Meantime Pomp had entered a strip of timber.

All at once, with wild, fierce yells, a band of a score of Indians, who were concealed in a thicket, rushed upon Pomp. He had only time to raise his rifle, and then he was knocked down by a tomahawk.

In an instant the darky was disarmed and surrounded by the band of Sioux.

Meantime, hearing the yells of the Indians, Frank Reade, Jr., and the doctor hastened back to the air-ship. Barney came close behind them, and when they had boarded the aerial vessel the Irishman told how he and Pomp had separated.

"It must be Pomp has fallen into the hands of the redskins, and we must rescue him," said Frank, Jr., instantly. Then the vessel was made to rise into the air, and her course was directed in the direction whence the yells of the Indians had emanated.

Though Pomp was knocked down his thick skull was not broken, and he was on his feet in a moment. But there was no such thing as forcing his way through the circle of savages who surrounded him.

The Indians had not discovered the air-ship, and they now began to hold a sort of pow-wow to decide how they should dispose of Pomp.

A big buck saw a shining brass scarf-pin in Pomp's shirt and he made a grab at it. Then suddenly Pomp ducked and butted that Indian so hard that he almost turned a somersault and had the breath all knocked out of him.

Just then the Indians decided that Pomp should be burnt at the stake, and the chief so announced in broken English.

Poor Pomp began to think it was all up with him this time when, glancing up, he saw, with feelings of great joy, that the Queen Clipper was floating above his head.

As yet Pomp had not been bound.

He had been discovered by those on board the air-ship, and Frank Reade had produced a long stout rope with a noose in one end. The Indians had not yet sighted the air-ship, and just as they were about to seize and bind Pomp, the young inventor made a skillful cast of the rope and the noose fell at Pomp's feet. Quick as thought the darky slipped it over his head and under his arms

and the succeeding moment he was drawn upward through the air, as the Queen Clipper was made to dart skyward.

Then the amazed and enraged savages leaped upward, making frantic efforts to seize Pomp. But he was whisked beyond their reach. The Indians yelled and discharged their weapons at Pomp as he was carried skyward at the end of the rope which was attached to the air-ship.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### OVER NORTHERN MEXICO—THE MOUNTAIN BRIGANDS.

THE Queen Clipper of the Clouds ascended to a height of several hundred feet above the heads of the astonished redskins, carrying Pomp further and further beyond the reach of the savages.

Then, when all danger to the darky from the Indians was over, Pomp was drawn on board the aerial vessel.

He was a happy fellow when he found himself once more safely on deck of the air-ship, surrounded by his friends.

"Gollie! Mars Frank!" exclaimed Pomp, as he was drawn over the rail. "Dis chile done want ter know if de wool am all tight on his head yet. Fo' de lawd! I'se so skeered I dunno wedder dem yellow niggers done took my skulp er not."

Pomp felt of his woolly pate and grinned.

"You certainly had a narrow escape, and an experience which no one envies you," replied Frank.

"Dat's de gospel truth, Marse Frank! S'pose dat rope broke, I'specs all dat would hab been left ob dis colored gent would hab been a grease spot."

"Faith an' nagurs are plinty. Wan wouldn't be missed, I'm thinkin'," said Barney.

He couldn't miss a chance to aggravate Pomp, though he had worked with a will to haul his colored comrade out of danger.

"What's dat, Irish?" demanded Pomp.

"Never mind. Barney, go to your post, and, Pomp, when you stop shaking in your shoes with fright, you can get back to your domain in the cook's galley," interposed Frank.

The Irishman and the darky, finding the prospect of a quarrel thus summarily squelched, each went to his post.

Meanwhile the course of the air-ship was changed by Frank's orders, and the Queen Clipper of the Clouds sailed southward.

The last the aerial voyagers saw of the Indians, from whom Pomp had been rescued, they were still watching the air-ship in amazement and chagrin.

The beautiful territory, which by act of Congress in March, 1872, had been declared the National Park of the United States, was passed over presently.

It was a wonderful country—a region of natural wonders—where nature had lavished grandeur of scenery as in no other land.

Well indeed did it merit the name of park—a park which instead of hills, ponds and brooks had mountains, lakes, rivers, and instead of fountains geysers of wonderful power.

The geysers rival those of Iceland, and coming in sight of them Frank Reade and Doctor Vaneyke, from their positions on the deck, could see the glittering columns of water darting upward toward the sky like mighty sprays of liquid silver.

And there were fan-shaped jets, spreading out magnificently, and crowded with rainbows, vertical torrents with a height of more than two hundred feet, and other strange shaped water-falls.

The air-ship sailed with the wind, and at its elevation the thermometer stood at about seventy degrees, a comfortable temperature.

"I think," remarked Dr. Vaneyke, "that this would be an excellent opportunity to inspect some portions of northern Mexico, whence have recently come extravagant reports of gold and silver discoveries."

"Yes, and we will sail over the region you allude to. Indeed, the president of 'The Plantagenet Mining Company' of Colorado, who is an old friend of mine, requested me to make some observations of the mining country in Mexico during this voyage," replied Frank.

The speed of the Queen Clipper was increased, and the dawn of a new day found the air-ship in sight of the Rio Grande.

The ship sailed over the river, which is the boundary line between the United States and Mexico, and swept onward over the adjacent country until the mountain region, rich in mineral wealth, though as yet imperfectly developed, owing to the sway of the Indian and Mexican brigands in the wild regions, lay below the wonderful vessel.

The mountains were rugged and inaccessible, save where the passes opened a way amid their frowning battlements.

All at once Frank uttered an exclamation, and then he called Dr. Vaneyke, who immediately joined him, beside the rail.

"Look yonder, doctor, and tell me what you

see?" said Frank, then, and he placed his field-glass in his friend's hand.

The doctor took an observation through the miniature telescope, and then he said:

"I see a trail at some distance to the southward, leading into a mountain pass, and three horsemen in the garb of Americans are traversing the trail on their way into the mountains."

"Right!" assented Frank. "But you have not yet made the discovery that startled me."

"No?"

"No indeed, doctor. Those three Americans are in deadly peril. They are advancing into an ambush of Mexican brigands. Look to the West, along the deep mountain pass."

The doctor leveled the glass in the direction indicated, and he saw a band of some fifteen swarthy desperadoes, in the gaudy costume of Mexicans, crouching behind the rocks and ready to fall upon the approaching horsemen, when the latter came abreast of them.

"I see Mexicans! Frank, we must try to save the men they mean to attack!" cried Dr. Vaneyke, excitedly.

"Yes," assented Frank, and he shouted an order to the fore and aft engineers, to increase the speed of the propellers, and the helmsman was also instantly ordered to steer for the pass in the mountains.

The Queen Clipper darted forward, on the sea of air, as if revivified with an accession of life power. But while she was yet too distant to render assistance to, or give the Americans a warning, the latter reached that portion of the defile in which the Mexicans had set their ambush.

Then, all at once, the mountain brigands sprang from their hiding-places, and fell upon the Americans. The surprised party was overwhelmed, despite their efforts at resistance!

And while the aerial Clipper came on as swiftly as possible, Frank and the good doctor saw the three Americans made captives by the brigands, and hurried into a cavern, the mouth of which could be seen in the side of the pass.

Then the defiant yells and derisive gestures of the Mexicans, as they clustered at the mouth of the cave and pointed out the air-ship to each other, told the young inventor that his approach had been detected.

"I'll drive these rascals into their underground retreat, at all events," gritted Frank.

And presently, when the air-ship was within range of the Mexicans, Frank, Pomp, Barney and the doctor opened fire on them with their Winchester.

But the Mexicans retreated into the cave, beyond the reach of the bullets from the air-ship.

Then dodging in and out, they returned the fire of the inventor and his comrades, shouting defiance and insulting taunts.

"We are baffled!" exclaimed Doctor Vaneyke.

"And in the depths of the cave these merciless outlaws may murder their captives," said Frank, in a tone of regret and disappointment.

"It seems we are powerless. The cave is a fortress to effectually shelter the Mexicans from the attack of the air-ship," continued the doctor.

The Queen Clipper was now suspended almost motionless in space. The propellers had been stopped.

"But the Mexicans' captives must be saved. The chances are the brigands will not immediately slay them, I think on second thought. It is their custom to hold their captives for ransom," said Frank, after a moment's silence.

"That is true," assented the doctor.

"The captives shall be saved if their lives are spared until nightfall. The unfortunate men are Americans, and I will never desert my countrymen," cried Frank.

The troubled, perplexed expression which had settled upon his features was in a measure dispelled.

Looking at him the doctor said, eagerly:

"I think you have hit upon some plan?"

"Yes. I'll explain it presently," rejoined Frank. Then he gave the crew some orders, and the air-vessel sailed away to the westward.

"Arrah, masher dear, is it running away from the yellow nagurs we are? Sure an' I'm breakin' the heart av me to think we're afther losin' a chance for a ruction! Faith, an' Pomp an' meself can lick the whole band av blackguards, if yez will have the illigant kindness til give us the chance," said Barney, in tones of appeal, as he came forward brandishing his shillalah.

"I'll give you chance enough for a ruction yet, before I'm through with the Mexicans, if all goes well," replied Frank.

"Begob, it's a happy mon I am, thin! Arrah, bedad, me arrums are gittin' stiff in the joints for the want av a chance for a bit av play wid the shillalah. Sure, an' I'll be afther breakin' the head av the nagur just to kape in practice if we don't have a ruction soon," replied Barney.



The air-ship was soon sailing over the highest mountain-tops. The supply of oxygen decreases with the density of the air, and this occasions the greatest danger of aerial navigation.

The want of oxygen at that great elevation was seriously felt by all, but the mountain range was safely passed.

"Now tell me your plan for the rescue of the cave-captives?" then said the doctor.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

A WONDERFUL RESCUE—FRANK, JR., FINDS SOMETHING.

"In one moment, doctor, I will make the ex-

up into space again, and no pause was made until the young inventor knew that an elevation higher than the most lofty mountain peak was attained.

Then the propellers were started, and the return voyage over the mountains was begun. For fear of discovery by the Mexicans, Frank did not dare show the electric light, and in the darkness the voyage over the mountains was a perilous undertaking.

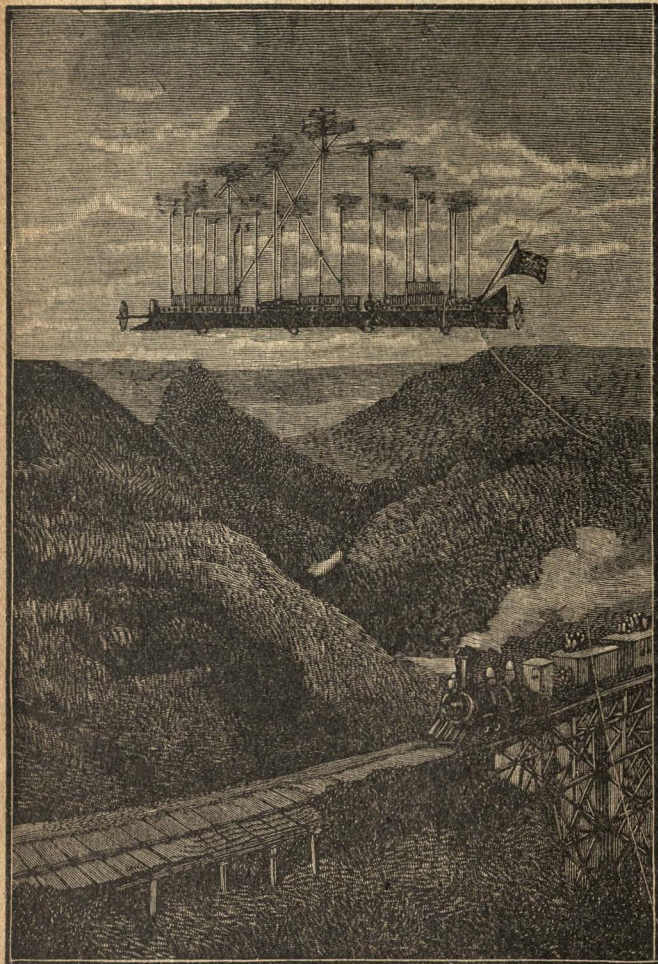
The lookout could not see ahead. If Frank Reade had made the least error in his calculations, and the air-ship was not higher than the most lofty mountain, then a terrible wreck in the night might ensue, by the Queen Clipper dashing against a mountain wall. In such an event, of course, there

was a camp-fire in the pass, at the mouth of the cave of the brigands.

Hanging in mid-air, the crew of the air-ship watched the camp-fire. They saw forms moving about it for a time. Then all save two of the forms entered the cave.

"The brigands have left two sentinels on guard," said Frank.

Then a careful descent was made into the pass. The Queen Clipper came to rest in the pass, fifty feet west of the mouth of the cave around a sharp curve. Being out of sight of the Mexican sentinels then, when the ship descended, Frank ventured to show a faint light, so as to obviate the danger of



Frank gave orders to cause the air vessel to float at a moderate height and a lookout was kept for a passing train. Half an hour later a train of passenger cars came in sight.



The Queen Clipper shot upward. Up! up! Out of the defile, and high above the peaks above, ascended the aerial craft.

planation you desire," replied Frank, to his friend's last remark. Then he ordered a descent to be made.

This was accomplished in the usual manner—by stopping the propelling screws and gradually diminishing the speed of the suspensory helices.

The Queen Clipper came to rest on the earth in a sheltered valley with scarcely a jar, owing to the springs under her hull.

Then Frank turned to the doctor again, and said:

"Now for my plan to save the Americans."

Then, speaking rapidly, he went on to tell of a novel and daring project he had formed, looking to the defeat of the Mexicans and the release of their American captives.

"Bravo!" exclaimed the doctor, when Frank concluded. "I really think the plan you have suggested is a feasible one."

The air vessel remained in the sheltered valley until nightfall.

Meantime Frank acquainted all the crew with his plans against the Mexican brigands, and he occupied himself, a portion of the time, in making preparations for the discomfiture of the mountain outlaws.

As Frank knew would be the case, the night at length came on moonless and dark.

Then the Queen Clipper of the clouds was sent

would be no escape for the crew of the air-ship. As the ship sped on through the darkness, the crew experienced anxiety and suspense such as was but natural under the circumstances.

In the stern engine-house Smith Brown crouched at the levers in a state of abject terror.

"Ah! If we are wrecked, not only do I lose my life, but the great project for which I have risked so much fails, and Leonidas Wickersham will go down to the grave, his ambition unsatisfied, his name and fame belittled by that of this upstart inventor, Frank Reade, Jr. But if we escape the peril of this night the Queen Clipper of the Clouds shall yet be mine!" he muttered.

The maniac's eyes gleamed like coals of fire in the gloom. He was terribly excited as well as alarmed.

But Frank Reade, Jr., had made no error in his calculations. He was not one to make a mistake which would cause the loss of his own life, and those who had ventured to make the wonderful air voyage in his company.

The mountains were safely crossed.

Then Frank was informed by the lookout that he saw a small fire. A descent was ordered. The air-ship floated earthward in the direction of the fire.

Very soon the young inventor made out that it

striking the walls of the pass, the space between them being rather narrow.

A landing having been made without accident, Frank produced a small portable battery, constructed according to his secret formula, that produced more powerful currents than electricians had heretofore dreamed of.

This battery was inclosed in a case similar to the knapsack of a soldier and provided with straps. Frank strapped it on his back.

Then he connected a small steel bar with the battery by means of wire. The steel bar was provided with a non-conducting handle, so that Frank Reade, Jr., grasped it in his hand fearlessly.

"One touch of that bar," said Frank to the doctor, "will shock a man to death instantly or to insensibility."

"Now, Barney and Pomp, are you ready?" he added, turning to his two faithful servants, whom he had already fully instructed as to what was to be done.

"Faith, an' we are, thin; an' I'm in a hurry, begob, for the bit av a ruction wid the Mixican nagurs to begin," said Barney.

"I see all ready too, Mars Frank," assented Pomp.

The two brave fellows advanced, armed with Winchesters and revolvers. They were fully aware that they were about to venture into the greatest



danger, but they were ready to follow Frank Reade anywhere.

"Now I am about to leave the air-ship. Remember, doctor, when I blow this silver whistle, turn on the electric light. It is so brilliant that it will radiate beyond the curve and illuminate the pass in front of the cave," said Frank finally. He indicated a silver whistle.

Then he shook hands with the good doctor, who knew it was possible he might never again see the young inventor alive.

The succeeding moment Frank left the ship, followed by Barney and Pomp, the latter carrying, besides his arms, a coil of flexible wire.

The trio crept stealthily toward the mouth of the cave. The camp-fire had now died down, and only the smoldering embers remained.

Peering around the angle of the pass Frank saw the two Mexican sentinels standing at the mouth of the cave, leaning on their carbines.

Frank experienced the greatest satisfaction as he saw that the two sentinels stood with their backs turned toward him.

Silently he stole forward.

Not a sound of his footsteps reached the hearing of the Mexican sentinels, and in a moment the young inventor was close upon them.

Then suddenly he raised the steel bar, charged with the wonderfully powerful electric currents, and in quick succession touched each of them.

The two brigands dropped as suddenly as if they had been struck down by a thunderbolt.

Then Barney and Pomp came forward quickly, and, working rapidly and silently, they stretched the wire across the mouth of the cave in a series of strands, six in number, placed a foot apart, and secured around the convenient jagged rocks on either side. The strands of wire were a foot from the ground. A person who stumbled over the first one would fall upon the others beyond.

Frank Reade, Jr., attached the end of the wire, which was unbroken throughout the entire six strands, to the battery he carried. In an instant then the strands were charged with the strong currents.

Then Frank snatched up one of the carbines belonging to the sentinels, and discharged the weapon. As he had expected the report alarmed the brigands, who were asleep in the cave.

Instantly they came rushing out of the cavern pell-mell. Then they were caught in the wires, and fell sprawling in every direction, shocked into insensibility or death.

Not one escaped. Barney and Pomp removed the wires.

Then Frank blew his silver whistle.

Immediately the electric light illuminated the pass. Seizing a fire brand from the smoldering embers the young inventor waved it through the air until it burst into a blaze. Then he rushed into the cave. There he found the three Americans bound hand and foot. Frank released them, and led them back in triumph to the air-ship. But as he reached the deck he suddenly picked up a small object that occasioned him a great mental shock.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE BLOODSTONE RING—THE AIR-SHIP FALLING.

A GLEAM from the electric light had fallen upon the object which Frank Reade, Jr., picked up. The flash and glitter of the thing made the young inventor see it.

And no wonder the sight gave him a mental shock, for the object he had found there on the deck of his aerial vessel was a bloodstone ring of singular and antique design.

At one glance Frank Reade, Jr., recognized the ring. It was the same ring that he had seen upon the large bony hand that was thrust through the window of his room at home when the night attempt was made to steal the tin box containing his plans and drawings of the Queen Clipper.

Frank Reade, Jr., was never more astounded in all his life. He looked at the strange antique ring with dilating eyes, and turned it over and over in his hand as if seeking to satisfy himself that he was not deceived.

But no. The recollection of the ring, as he had obtained an excellent view of it on the thief's hand, caused him to feel positive that it was beyond all doubt the self-same ring.

The doctor saw Frank pick up the ring.

He came quickly to the side of the young inventor, and witnessing his agitation, asked, in solicitude:

"What is it, Frank?"

"This ring," replied the young inventor.

"I do not understand."

"I saw that same ring on the hand of the unknown thief who tried to steal my plans in Readestown."

"No!"

"It is the truth."

"Good heavens, Frank, you astound me!"

"I am myself completely amazed."

"But how could the thief's ring come here—on the deck of the Queen Clipper?"

"That's the question we must answer."

"Frank," and the doctor seized the young inventor's arm in his excitement—"Frank, can it be the thief is on board the air-ship?"

"What else can we conclude?"

"What, indeed?"

"Doctor, the mystery of the secret enemy that I have decided is among us is more perplexing than ever now."

"He lost this ring. The man who tried to assassinate you on board this vessel is the owner of this ring."

"Yes, I am sure of that. He and the thief I foiled in Readestown are one and the same."

"What shall we do?"

"We have already vainly tried to trap the scoundrel."

"Yes. His cunning enables him to elude all detection."

"But for all that I've an idea that I shall unmask him yet."

"I trust you may do so before he accomplishes the doom of the air-ship. I fear he is here to destroy it."

"Well, we will dismiss the subject for the present. I see the rescued men are approaching, and I desire to talk with them," said Frank.

The three Americans who had been captured by the Mexican brigands now came up.

"We wish to thank you for our lives, sir, and explain who and what we are!" said one of the men.

Then he introduced his companions and went on to say:

"We are prospectors from Santa Fe. We were sent out to explore the mountains of Mexico to ascertain, if possible, the mineral wealth they really possess."

"Do you wish to return home?" asked Frank.

"Yes. We have had enough of Mexico."

"Then nothing is easier."

"How so?"

"I'll sail north and put you on board a railway train."

"How can we sufficiently thank you?"

"It is a pleasure for me to render you assistance."

Frank then ordered an ascension, and very soon the noble aerial Clipper was sailing the air northward.

In a few hours the air-ship was in sight of the Southern Pacific railway.

Then Frank gave orders to cause the air vessel to float at a moderate height, and a lookout was kept for a passing train.

Half an hour later a train of passenger cars came in sight.

Frank sprang to the bow turret and rang the bell violently, while Dr. Vaneyke displayed a large sign, upon which he had painted the single word "Stop," in great black letters on a white background.

The train stopped, for the engineer heard the bell ring on the air-ship and read the sign.

Then the Queen Clipper floated to the earth and the rescued prospectors were taken on board the passenger train and carried on their homeward way.

After this the course of the aerial craft was due west.

An excellent rate of speed was maintained and the vessel was not very long in reaching the great Rocky Mountains.

The Queen Clipper was floating over a deep pass in the wildest part of the great mountain range, where the perpendicular walls towered hundreds of feet toward the sky, when an accident occurred.

All at once the suspensory helices ceased to revolve.

The natural consequences ensued. The air-ship dropped downward with awful speed. Right into the terrible fall between the walls of the defile sank The Queen Clipper of the Clouds.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Dr. Vaneyke were on deck at the time.

The terrible sensation of falling, and the sudden cessation of the whirling sound made by the suspensory helices, warned them of what was taking place.

The doctor reeled against the rail as it flashed upon his mind that the Queen Clipper was falling to certain destruction upon the rocks below at the bottom of the gloomy defile.

Not so with Frank Reade, Jr.

For a single instant the young inventor was appalled.

Then he bounded into the central cabin, where was the engine that drove the machinery of the suspensory helices.

A thrilling sight met his view.

Richard Sands, the engineer lay face downward on the floor of the engine-room, seemingly dead,

and the electric current was all turned off from the machinery. Sands' body lay across the levers that touched the floor.

Leaping over the body of Richard Sands, Frank Reade reached the levers and reversed them instantly, thus turning on the motive power to the engine.

Then the suspensory helices spun round again like lightning, for Frank had thrown the levers back to the furthest notch, and so turned on all the strength of the battery.

The result was what Frank desired.

The Queen Clipper shot upward.

Up! up! Out of the defile and high above the peaks above, ascended the aerial craft.

Then the doctor rushed into the central turret, and he and Frank quickly ascertained that the engineer was not dead.

Engineer Sands was revived.

When he had fully recovered, he explained that he was seated at the levers, counting over the contents of a small leather bag, in which he carried the savings of several months, when suddenly he received a terrible blow on the head from the rear, and the bag of money was snatched from his hand as he fell upon the levers, depressing them by his weight, and so turning off all the electricity, and causing the suspensory helices to instantly become stationary.

"Ah! the thief fled with the money before he comprehended that the air-ship was falling. Then he did not dare return to reverse the levers, for fear I might see him," said Frank.

This was undoubtedly the explanation.

The thief could not have meant to hurl the air-ship to the bottom of the defile, for that would have been to seal his own doom.

Frank was turning from the engine-room in the center cabin when, all at once, there came the report of a terrific explosion, and it was instantly followed by a violent concussion against the side of the air-ship.

"Good heavens! What now?" cried Frank, in alarm.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### FRANK READE, JR., DETECTS THE WRONG MAN.

FRANK READE and the doctor rushed out of the central cabin as the explosion sounded, and the shock came against the side of The Queen Clipper of the Clouds.

The air-ship was at that time passing along the side wall of a lofty mountain, and the cause of the explosion and the shock subsequently received by the aerial craft, at once became apparent to the young inventor and his companion.

A force of miners was at work, blasting the rocks on the mountain side to open a shaft.

A heavy blast had been set off just as the Queen Clipper passed by, and a fragment of rock of considerable size had been hurled against the vessel.

But no injury worthy of note was sustained by the air-ship, and Frank saw that all danger was passed.

A higher elevation was then attained, as a precaution against a repetition of the accident, for it was seen that the Queen Clipper was now passing over a mining country.

The grand mountains had been invaded by the daring prospectors and hardy miners, to whom no dangers or difficulties are allowed to become barriers to the search for gold.

Here and there, in the gulches and defiles, mining camps had been established, and those little settlements presented a picturesque and interesting sight.

Beside mountain streams miners were busy washing the gold from the water, carried in long wooden flumes, on the floor of which the precious metal would become deposited by its own weight, there to be secured when the torrent was excluded from the flume.

Hydraulic mining was in progress on the mountain side, and there great masses of earth were washed down by hurling streams of water against the bank.

This method, and the more difficult plan of shaft-mining seemed to prevail, for capital was invested in the work of rescuing the precious metal from the bosom of the mountain, and no expense was spared to secure the treasure.

As the ship of the air sailed onward above these interesting scenes Frank Reade, Jr., and Dr. Vaneyke were discussing the last startling phase of the mystery on board The Queen Clipper of the Clouds.

"Who is the thief who robbed Engineer Sands?" said Dr. Vaneyke.

"Undoubtedly he is the owner of the antique bloodstone ring," replied the young inventor.

"I agree with you," assented the doctor.

"Yes, the rascal who so nearly wrecked our air vessel just now and almost killed the chief engineer is my mysterious foe."



"Frank, I've an idea we may turn this last incident to good account in detecting the fellow."

"How so, doctor?"

"The stolen money is yet on board the vessel no doubt, and probably concealed on the person of the thief or in his quarters."

"That's so. I see what you mean to suggest. You would propose that every man of the crew be searched, and the quarters of every one of them carefully inspected."

"Yes, that is my idea precisely. Do you not approve of it?"

"Assuredly I do, and we will carry it into execution," replied Frank readily.

Meantime, the man who had assaulted Engineer Sands and stolen his money overheard all the conversation just recorded.

Frank Reade, Jr., and the doctor were standing near the door of the stern cabin. Just inside the door stood Smith Brown.

The crazy inventor's face wore an expression of intense alarm. But all at once that look was supplemented by one of cunning and satisfaction.

At that very moment Engineer Richard Sands' bag of money was in Smith Brown's pocket. He had been passing the door of the central turret when Sands was counting his savings.

The sight of the money tempted the maniac.

"Ah," he had thought, "money is power. With it I might yet bribe the crew to mutiny against Frank Reade, Jr., and help me seize The Queen Clipper of the Clouds."

He resolved to possess himself of Sands' money, and as he chanced to have a heavy iron wrench in his hand, he stole upon Sands and struck him down. Then he fled with the bag of money unseen, and gained his own station. It was only then that the sensation of falling warned him that he had done something to cause the central engine to stop. A thought of the true explanation dawned upon him, and he was about to rush back to repair the accident, when he saw Frank Reade going into the central turret.

Smith Brown, after hearing the conversation between Frank Reade and the doctor, which has been last recorded, resolved upon a ruse to evade detection that was an example of the singular cunning often evinced by dangerous maniacs.

Frank and the doctor left the door of the stern cabin and walked to the rail amidship.

There they continued their conversation.

"I shall call all the crew out on deck and have them drawn up in line. Then you and I will search each man, and in case the stolen money is not found on any one of them, we will then, without allowing one of the men to leave the deck, go into their several quarters, and there continue our quest for Sands' money," said Frank.

"That is an excellent plan," the doctor agreed.

Then Frank rang the bell and gave the signal for "all hands on deck."

Every man responded. Meanwhile Smith Brown had carried out his cunning plan to evade detection. When Frank and the doctor moved away from his cabin he glided out of it and crept into the helmsman's turret. Steersman Hall was there, at his post. As Smith Brown knew, Hall's pea-jacket hung beside the door. To transfer the stolen bag of money from his own person to the pocket of Hall's jacket was, for Smith Brown, but the work of a moment. Then he noiselessly regained his own station.

When Frank Reade, Jr., called all hands to the deck, Hall was one of the first to come out of the helmsman's room. But he paused long enough to put on his pea-jacket.

In a few moments all hands save Sands were drawn up in line on the deck.

Then Frank Reade, Jr., addressed them:

"Men," said he, "a murderous assault, and a most daring robbery has just been committed on our aerial vessel."

Continuing, he briefly related the circumstances of the case and then he added:

"I am fully determined to discover the culprit and punish him, for with such a villain at large among us, I feel that none of our lives are safe."

Frank paused, and the men one and all voiced their approval. Smith Brown was loudest in speaking, and when Frank went on to say that each man must submit to be searched, the cunning maniac was the first one to step forward and request to be examined.

He was thoroughly searched by Frank.

Of course the money was not found on him, and then each of the men was searched in turn.

It chanced that Hall was the last man to be searched.

Frank went through Hall's pockets, but at first he found nothing, and he was about to turn from him when he felt something between the lining of his coat. Thrusting his hand once more into the inside pocket of Hall's pea-jacket, Frank found a rent in the bottom of the pocket which he had not previously discovered, and then between the

lining of the coat, where it had slipped between the lining, he found Sands' bag of money.

Hall turned pale, and started in genuine surprise and consternation, as the stolen property, which Sands promptly identified, was drawn out of his pocket.

Frank Reade, Jr., was astonished, too.

He had never suspected Hall. Indeed, the young inventor had always looked upon the helmsman as a particularly honest and reliable man. Hence he had given him the important post he held on the air vessel.

For a moment Hall was stricken speechless, and then as an idea flashed upon Frank Reade's mind, he looked critically at Hall's hands.

It chanced they were large and bony.

So were the hands of the owner of the antique bloodstone ring, as Frank Reade, Jr., knew.

The young inventor believed he had been terribly deceived in Hall's character, and that he had found his mysterious enemy at last. But the mystery of why Hall was his foe was still unsolved.

"My God, Mr. Reade! You don't think me guilty? I swear to you I don't know how the money came in my pocket! I am innocent!" suddenly cried Hall, in agitated tones, as he found his voice and realized that he was under a terrible suspicion.

But while Frank Reade, Jr., wished to deal justly he was self-deceived. The evidence was, to his mind, convincing, and he turned to Pomp and Barney, and said sternly:

"Put that man in irons and confine him in the hold."

Hall saw that protestations of innocence and appeals for leniency would be useless. Indignation and intense anger against Frank took possession of his mind, and as he was led away by Pomp and Barney, he hissed fiercely:

"By heavens, Frank Reade, I swear I will yet make you pay dearly for the great wrong—the terrible injustice you have this day done me!"

## CHAPTER XVII.

### TWO STRANGERS ON BOARD THE QUEEN CLIPPER.

The crew was dismissed when Hall had been taken below and placed in irons.

Then Smith Brown returned to the stern engine cabin. He was delighted, and an expression of demonic exultation distorted his pale intellectual features.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed, when he was alone. "This is better than I dared hoped! Ha! ha! The spirits of the air are on my side! Now no suspicion will be directed to me, and I've accomplished a great work, for I have succeeded in making one of the crew Frank Reade's enemy. Hall will not forget his oath of vengeance, and when the time comes he will help to raise a mutiny and seize the air-ship, for I shall set him free."

The insane inventor had already made a study of each man of the crew. He had accurately decided that Hall was a man of vindictive impulses when he thought he was wronged.

It might be that the steersman would yet, as Smith Brown believed, really become his confederate in a plot to steal The Queen Clipper of the Clouds from the young inventor.

Frank Reade, Jr., felt greatly relieved as he thought that at last he had detected the secret enemy who had been at the bottom of all the mysterious occurrences which had transpired on board the air-ship.

But the young inventor was really sorry that one who had won his confidence had proved so unworthy.

He discussed the matter with Dr. Vaneyke, and the good old scientist shook his head, and said in evident perplexity:

"I'm not satisfied. To my mind the mystery is not fully cleared up. Hall evidently stole the money; but the idea is strong in my mind that some one who has scientific and chemical knowledge, such as Hall does not possess, tried to steal the secrets of the battery-room."

"You make me uneasy again, doctor. But then I'll not borrow trouble. Come, let us walk forward, I think I see the line of a railway yonder," and Frank pointed to the northward as he spoke.

The doctor and the youthful inventor walked to the bow cabin, and presently they made out the line of steel rails that marked the course of a railway on the earth below.

Frank took an observation through his telescope, and then exclaimed:

"Doctor, a great landslide has taken place in the cut of the railroad through the wooded hills. The next train that comes along will be wrecked unless we can prevent it, for the sharp turns through the hills, which the railway is compelled to make, will prevent the engineers discovering the landslide in time."

"Really, Frank, I begin to think you are destined to become the good genius of the railways. You have already saved one train by driving off

the outlaws who meant to derail it, and now I trust you may be the salvation of another train," said Dr. Vaneyke.

"I shall try, and in this instance my knowledge of telegraphy will serve me," responded Frank.

Then he ordered a descent.

The air-ship floated gracefully earthward and alighted near the land-slide on the railway track.

Then Frank produced a battery and a small telegraphic outfit, and sent Pomp up one of the telegraph poles, beside the railway, with a coil of wire. Pomp had received proper instructions, and he neatly tapped the wire at the top of the pole.

Then Frank connected the telegraph machine with the wire Pomp had attached to the telegraph line and sent two messages—one east, the other west—giving warning of the land-slide.

Very soon the young inventor received answers to both of his dispatches from adjacent stations thanking him for his information, and stating that he had undoubtedly saved a wreck.

The voyage of the aerial vessel was then resumed at but a moderate elevation. The Queen Clipper was now sailing over the eastern portion of California and all were interested in observing the country.

Never was such a grand opportunity for inspecting the works of nature offered to man before.

Not long after the railway was left in the rear, while the air clipper was gently pursuing her course over an uninhabited portion of the country, two men were discovered on a trail leading toward the foothills which had been left behind.

The two men on the lonely trail were running in the direction of the hills. But all at once it became evident that they had sighted the air-ship.

They came to a halt, and began to gesticulate in a manner which Frank Reade, Jr., at once comprehended.

"Surely," said he, "those men are seeking to induce us to descend. We have nothing to fear, as they are the only persons near, and I am curious to find out what they want."

"Let us descend, then," advised the doctor, and Frank issued the necessary orders to the crew, and the Queen Clipper descended to within speaking distance of the two men on the earth below.

"Hello!" cried Frank to them. "What do you want?"

"We want to take passage with you. We have escaped from a band of road agents, who stole our horses, and who are now after us, though the woods yonder as yet conceal them," replied one of the men, pointing at a belt of timber a mile distant.

"All right," answered Frank, and then the air-ship was brought to a rest on the earth, and the two strangers came on board. The voyage was at once resumed.

The two strangers were well dressed, and both wore silk hats. One was a tall, thin personage, with a shrewd-looking face, cleanly shaven, save for a tuft of long hair on the point of his chin. He was undoubtedly a Down East Yankee, and he could have taken the part of "Uncle Sam" in a pantomime without much making up.

He introduced himself as Zeke Beam.

The other stranger was rather thick-set, and he wore a full beard, and his features were decidedly heavy. He called himself Ben Driggs.

The men explained that they were prospectors from the East, and incidentally let it appear that they were financially well fixed.

Beam proposed to Frank presently that the air-ship should assist them in their prospecting.

"You can name your own price, and we will pay it if you will cruise about for us for a short time. We anticipate going to Salt Lake to look at some lands near that great inland body of water. Will you take us there?" asked Beam.

Frank was quite willing to do so, and he said as much. Beam and Driggs expressed themselves delighted.

The young inventor then left them to themselves, and it was amusing to see them walking about the deck inspecting everything with wonder and curiosity.

"Wall, this beats me!" said the Yankee to his companion when they were alone. "I tell ye, Ben, it's a big thing, by gosh. We were in big luck gettin' picked up by this here flyin'-machine, otherwise the chances are by this time we would have stretched hemp. The regulators meant to catch us sure."

"That's so. I wonder what Reade would say if he knew we were the two road agents all the sheriffs of Eastern California have been vainly trying to run down for months. Ha, ha! the good clothes we secured last week and your slick yarn fooled the young captain of this queer craft neatly and we shall give the sheriffs the slip," replied Driggs.

"Yas, and I worked it to get carried a long way from this part o' their country which has become too hot to hold us. Now we're bound for Salt Lake," said Beam.

Frank Reade and the doctor found the stranger



very agreeable. Both were good talkers, and they exerted themselves to please.

The air vessel cruised about over the mountain mining regions again for a couple of days, and then the course was set for Utah.

The voyage was made in safety, and no adventure of importance transpired until the aerial vessel was passing over Salt Lake. The elevation of the air craft above the surface of the lake was scarcely a hundred feet, when, all at once, a strange hissing, roaring sound came up from the waves.

"De lake am shootin' up ter swallow us!" cried Pomp, falling on his knees at the door of the forward cabin, after obtaining a glimpse of the water. Only Beam, Driggs and assistant steersman Blake

However, the Queen Clipper escaped. It was not destined to destruction then, and the water spout did not quite reach it. The spiral agitation of the atmosphere extended above the revolving column of water, and so lifted the air-ship upward.

Frank Reade, Jr., appeared on deck almost as soon as the two strangers had discovered the cause of Pomp's alarm.

The young inventor at once shouted orders to engineer Sands to turn on the electricity to the suspensory screws, and a safe elevation was quickly attained, for Sands promptly obeyed orders.

Some time later, after he and Driggs had held a long private consultation, Beam sauntered to the

proposition he had in mind before he saw the gold.

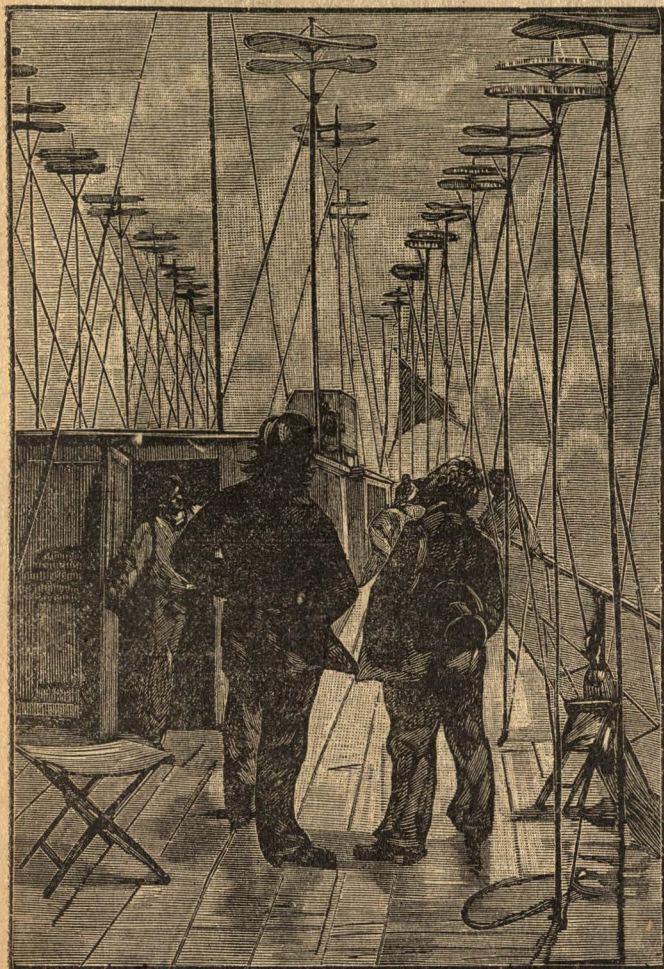
Returning to Driggs, Beam acquainted the latter with his discovery. Then the two rascals conversed earnestly.

Meantime there was trouble between Africa and Ireland.

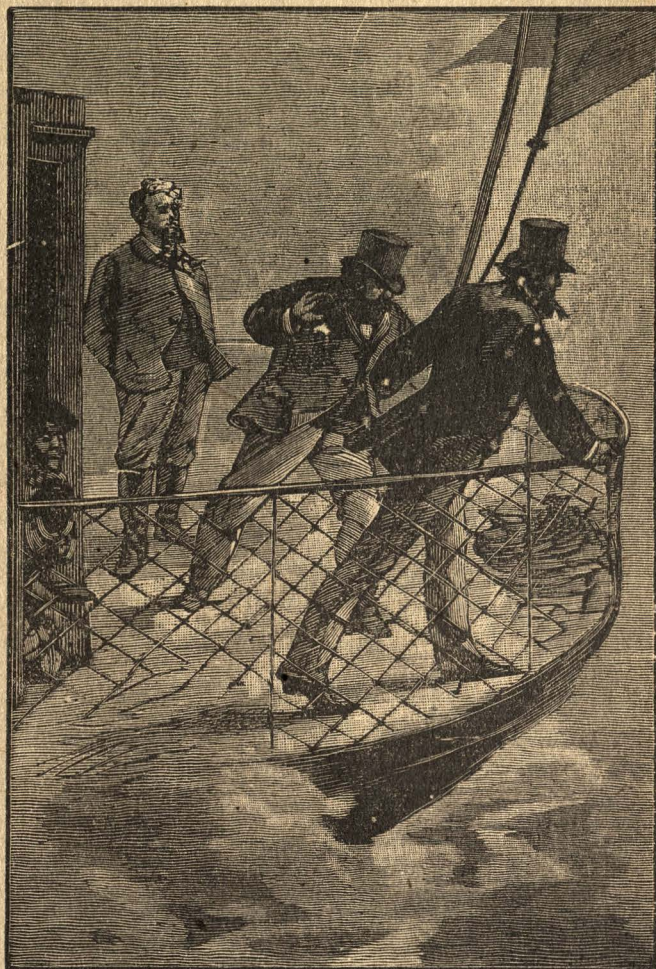
When it was seen that the danger from the water-spout was passed, Barney had taunted Pomp with being afraid, and only Frank Reade, Jr.'s, intervention had prevented a "ruction."

Later Pomp was on deck, tilted back in a camp-chair against the cook's galley, Barney crept up slyly and kicked the legs of the chair. Down went Pomp in a heap.

Barney ran for the other side of the deck.



The young inventor then left them to themselves, and it was amusing to see them walking about the deck inspecting everything with wonder and curiosity.



Beam and Driggs rushed to the rail and looked over. The sight which they beheld was a remarkable one, and for the space of a moment it seemed that Pomp's fears would be realized.

were on deck. Barney had temporarily relieved Blake.

Beam and Driggs rushed to the rail and looked over.

What did they see?

#### CHAPTER XVIII.

##### A REMARKABLE PHENOMENON—A PLOT TO BLOW UP THE QUEEN CLIPPER.

THE sight which Beam and Driggs beheld was a remarkable one, and for the space of a moment it seemed that Pomp's fears would be realized.

Certain atmospheric phenomenon had caused a "water spout." Beam and Driggs saw the water of the lake whirled upward, in a mighty column, in which tons of water were sustained. The roar and hiss of the revolving mass suggested the idea that a terrible whirlwind was imprisoned in the hollow center of the great water-spout.

The air was filled with mist and flying spray. At sea, as is well known, the water-spout is regarded as one of the greatest perils the navigator can encounter.

On the Southern Pacific, where the water-spout is not a very rare occurrence at certain seasons, many vessels have been overwhelmed by the phenomenon.

But the occurrence of a water-spout on Salt Lake was a most surprising incident.

door of Frank Reade, Jr.'s, cabin, to which the inventor had just retired.

The cunning Yankee desperado had it in mind to make Frank Reade, Jr., a certain new proposition looking to the interests of himself and his companion.

Now, the young inventor carried a large sum of money in gold on board the air-ship, so that he could meet any expenses that might be incurred through unlooked-for accidents or any other cause.

The money was in a box under the floor of the young inventor's cabin.

Frank meant to presently land near Salt Lake City, and make some needed purchases, and so, after locking the door of his cabin, as he supposed, he pushed aside a movable board in the floor, and took out the box of money. Just then Beam reached the door. Frank did not hear him, but Beam caught the clink of gold, as the inventor took some of the coin from the box.

The desperado tried the door silently, while his eyes gleamed with the light of avarice. The door yielded. Frank had not secured it as he thought.

Beam pushed it ajar an inch, and looked into the cabin. He saw the treasure Frank Reade, Jr., carried on board the air-ship.

Then he noiselessly closed the door and stole away.

He had decided not to make the inventor the

"Fo' de Lawd I'se gwine to hab blood!" roared the enraged dorky.

Then he ran after Barney. A chase round and round the deck ensued. Barney had a stub of a clay pipe in his mouth. Coming in contact with the cannon, which had been left charged and primed, a spark from the Irishman's pipe fell on the priming.

Instantly the cannon was discharged. And it kicked. The carriage recoiled, and the most frightened Irishman that ever was seen pitched head over heels on the deck.

"Worra! Worra! It's kilt I am! Arrest nagur fer suicide. Sure he shot me with a forty-pound ball!" yelled Barney.

Pomp had just passed the muzzle of the cannon when it was discharged. The ball sped by in such close proximity to the dorky that its wind almost knocked him down.

Pomp turned as white as his dark, brunette complexion could turn. He was frightened as badly as Barney was, and he stood stock still for a moment, while the wool on the top of his head arose on end.

Then he roared: "Murder! I'se gwine ter sue yer for highway burglary! Dis yer an slaughter ob de fust degree! Now I'se got yer, Irish, an' I'se gwine ter hab gore!"

Barney had now regained his feet.



Pomp ducked his head and rushed at him.

But Barney was too quick for the dorky that time. He jumped aside, and Pomp, unable to stop, ran head first into Ben Driggs.

Barney roared with laughter. But Driggs did not think it a laughing matter, for all the breath was knocked out of his body.

"Whoop! Begob ye telescoped the wrong nine pin that toime, nagur!" cried Barney, and Pomp, having recovered himself, was coming at him again when Frank Reade, Jr., interposed as usual to prevent a fight.

Driggs got on his feet again, and Pomp asked his pardon. Understanding it was an accident, Driggs said it was all right, but he looked as if he felt all wrong.

That evening at sunset, The Queen Clipper of the Clouds was over Salt Lake City. The voyagers had a good view of the public buildings, including the Mormon Temple.

Frank had the aerial vessel run about a mile beyond the city of the Mormons, and then a descent was made, and the aerial vessel was anchored at a height of three hundred feet. A rope of that length was dropped over the side. At its end was an anchor. This trailed along the ground for a space, and finally fixed itself firmly between two rocks.

The cable stretched taut, and the Queen Clipper floated in the air like a ship at anchor on the sea.

Frank Reade did not, in this instance, care to have the air-ship pass the night on the earth. He wished to guard against intruders who might be prowling about so near the city.

In the morning, it was his intention to go into Salt Lake City and make the purchases he required.

The first half of the night was clear and light. The moon shone brightly, and the stars lent their additional illumination. But after midnight the sky darkened, and the clouds that covered moon and stars indicated a storm.

Just after midnight the door of Frank Reade's cabin, in which he was sleeping soundly, was opened by Beam by means of a "pick-lock." The Yankee desperado stole into the cabin, and without waking the young inventor, secured the treasure box from its hiding-place under the floor, and carried it out of the cabin. He gained the deck. There, at the head of the companion-way, he met Driggs, who said:

"It's all right. I set the fuse among the powder kegs in the hold!"

"And I have Frank Reade's treasure. Now we must lose no time in getting clear of the air-ship, for it is doomed," replied Beam.

"Yes; the fuse I set is a time fuse. Before it burns down to the powder I have sprinkled among the kegs we can escape by the anchor rope to the ground."

"Come on! What is a descent of three hundred feet, even if it is to be made on a single rope, when a fortune is to be gained? Nothing, by gosh!" responded Beam.

Then he secured the box in a bag and tied it on his shoulders. The two desperados stole to the anchor rope and began to climb down it hand over hand.

"In five minutes the powder in the hold of the air-ship will explode, and the flying machine will be blown to atoms," said Driggs, in a whisper, presently.

Then the two villains continued their perilous descent of the anchor rope, while in the hold of the Queen Clipper the time fuse burned nearer and nearer to the powder.

Frank Reade, Jr., slept on, little dreaming of his awful peril.

#### CHAPTER XIX.

SMITH BROWN GAINS TWO CONFEDERATES—THE MANIAC'S PLOT PROSPERS.

WHILE Frank Reade, Jr., slept peacefully during that night fraught with the most terrible danger for the wonderful aerial ship and all its crew, Smith Brown was awake.

The insane inventor meant to secretly pay a visit to steersman Hall in the latter's prison in the hold of the Queen Clipper.

Stealing noiselessly from his quarters, the maniac professor was about to descend into the hold when he saw a man stealthily ascending the companion-stairs.

Drawing silently back into the shadows cast by the central turret, Smith Brown waited and watched until the man whom he had discovered came upon the deck.

Then he recognized Driggs.

The villain was just coming to join his confederate, Beam, the Yankee, after setting the time-fuse in the ammunition-chamber, which he intended should soon consummate the destruction of the Queen Clipper by a terrible explosion.

The cunning maniac immediately conjectured that there was something wrong, and suddenly

detecting the smell of the burning fuse, as Driggs passed along the deck, he silently darted down the companion stairs.

Guided then by the sense of smell, the insane scientist quickly arrived at the place where Driggs had set the time-fuse.

Then a true conception of the nefarious project of the two desperados permeated Smith Brown's acute though diseased brain.

At once he extinguished the fuse, and picking up a heavy hatchet, which he chanced to find conveniently at hand, he hastened back to the deck, maintaining the same silence in the return transit that had characterized all his previous movements.

A moment subsequently, standing at the head of the companion way, Smith Brown heard Beam and Driggs at the anchor cable.

"Ah!" said the insane inventor under his breath. "They mean to desert the Queen Clipper, now that they have doomed it, as they suppose, to certain destruction. But I'll foil them. Ha! The events of this night shall place them in my power. To save themselves they shall be compelled to join me in my conspiracy to seize the aerial ship."

To gain the stern turret was with Smith Brown then but the work of a moment.

Like a shadow, unseen by the Yankee or his comrade, the maniac darted into his quarters and procured a dark-lantern, which he had brought on board in his chest.

Meanwhile, as heretofore described, Beam and Driggs had begun the perilous descent of the great anchor rope.

To this cable where it was made fast to the capstan Smith Brown advanced instantly, and the succeeding moment leaning over the rail he flashed the light of his dark-lantern in a brilliant halo down the strand that united the ship of the air with the earth below.

The shaft of light cut the darkness like a blade of flame, and in its diverging plane Smith Brown beheld Beam and Driggs clinging to the cable several feet below.

Their upturned faces showed white and terror-stricken in the light, as with eyes dilated in intense alarm they looked upward.

Smith Brown raised the hatchet, which he now held in his right hand, and the light flashed from its polished blade as he made a menacing gesture as though he meant to sever the anchor rope.

The awful terror of the two men on that single swaying strand, nearly three hundred feet above the surface of the earth, may be imagined.

For a moment their intense alarm rendered them speechless, frozen into the silence of complete consternation.

"Come back!" commanded Smith Brown, in intense and threatening tones. "Come back, or I'll cut the anchor rope and hurl you down to instant death."

"Hold! For God's sake, man, don't murder us that way!" Beam found power to gasp.

"Don't cut the rope—we'll come back," said Driggs in trembling tones.

"Make haste. Every moment there is danger that some one besides myself may discover you," replied Smith Brown.

The two villains might have wondered at this remark had they not been in such a state of consternation that they could not think of anything save the peril of the moment.

Hand over hand they ascended the cable, and presently they again stood upon the deck of the Queen Clipper of the Clouds, confronted by the muzzle of a revolver leveled at them by Smith Brown, who had discarded the hatchet to hold the weapon.

"The fuse! My God, are we to be blown up with the air-ship! Quick! As you value your life let us descend to the hold!" cried Beam in supreme terror.

"No! I extinguished the fuse. There is no danger. Stand where you are, both of you, and listen to me. I shall not hesitate to use my weapon if necessary," said Smith Brown.

Then he continued, while his pale face worked with involuntary nervous twitches, and his eyes scintillated with maniacal brilliancy.

"I alone know what you have done and what you meant to do. All save myself on the air-ship are yet sleeping. You are in my power. If I denounce you, Frank Reade, Jr., will surely have you punished according to law for the great crime you have attempted. As certainly as you stand here, in that event, you can hope for nothing less than many years of imprisonment."

The infernal cunning of the maniac inventor here prompted him to pause to observe the effect upon the two villains of his menacing speech.

Zeke Beam responded quickly: "Let us off! Don't betray us to Frank Reade, Jr., and we'll return all the gold we took from his cabin before he awakes; and more, we'll swear to do anything you say to save ourselves. We will, by gosh! El! Driggs?"

"Yes, anything, only don't give us away," assented Driggs.

Zeke Beam had, as he spoke, deposited the bag containing Frank Reade, Jr.'s, gold on the deck at the feet of the maniac.

Smith Brown's eyes brightened then. This was, of course, the first knowledge he had that the two villains had robbed Frank Reade, Jr.

Speaking rapidly he went on to say:

"You behold in me one who has devoted a lifetime to the study and invention of aerial machines. I was on the eve of the great discovery, which is the secret of the success of the Queen Clipper, when Frank Reade, Jr., this upstart young owner of this air-ship, forestalled me. He robbed me of my ideas. I have vowed vengeance. Ah, ha! shall the world accept Frank Reade, Jr., as the greatest of modern inventors while I live? Never! Never! I have sworn to be king of the air and to seize this vessel and put to death the young usurper who has dared rush before me in the domain of aerial science, and snatch almost from my very grasp the grand discovery for which I have given the patient toil and study of a lifetime!

"Yes, the Queen Clipper shall be mine! Now listen—I will keep the secret of your theft and your attempt to blow up the air-ship if you will swear to devise some excuse to remain on board, and when I call upon you to do so, help me to make myself the master of the vessel."

Smith Brown paused.

"We agree! We'll do it!" replied the two rascals in unison.

They did not suspect, as yet, that they were dealing with a maniac. Judging him by their own perverted standard for the measurement of character and motives, his startling project seemed to them only reasonable and natural.

"Then you are safe. I'll trust you, and when the ship is mine I'll share this gold with you," said Smith Brown.

"Good! Now we are partners. Let's git the gold back to its place," advised Beam.

"Yes. The discovery of its loss now might cause Frank Reade, Jr., to suspect you," assented Smith Brown.

Then he allowed the Yankee to take the treasure back to its hiding-place.

Beam succeeded in returning it to the space under the floor of Frank Reade, Jr.'s cabin undetected by the young inventor.

Then Smith Brown saw Beam and Driggs retire to the quarters that had been assigned them, and there he left the two road-agents.

But before he withdrew Smith Brown said warningly:

"Remember, I shall watch you, and if I find you are up to any treachery against me I'll kill you both. I'm a desperate man—retain my confidence and all will be well."

The night passed uneventfully after that.

The following morning Frank Reade, Jr., and Dr. Vaneyke met Beam and Driggs at breakfast in the dining saloon, where Pomp served a really excellent meal.

In the course of the conversation, in which all took part, Beam remarked:

"Mr. Reade, my friend Driggs and myself are so well pleased with our experiences on board the air ship thus far, that we have both resolved to volunteer to join your ship's company for the remainder of the aerial cruise you may have in mind. We have, by gosh. We don't like the looks of the land hereabouts, and want none of it."

"And we've noticed you are a little short-handed, so we want to say we will be glad to take hold and do our share of ship duty," added Driggs.

"Really, gentlemen, this proposition is an agreeable surprise. The necessity for putting one of my men in irons has left me a man short, so I'll gladly accept you, and you can take turns at the wheel. The steersman is the man under arrest," replied Frank, well pleased.

And so it was settled.

Smith Brown's confederates became members of the crew of the air-ship.

#### CHAPTER XX.

IN SALT LAKE CITY—A BEREAVED MOTHER—BARNEY AND POMP.

SHORTLY after breakfast, Frank Reade, Dr. Vaneyke, Pomp and Barney, got ready to go to Salt Lake City.

The suspensory helices were slowed up until the Queen Clipper descended to the earth. Then the young inventor and his friends stepped over the rail and descending the landing-ladder, found themselves once more safe on terra firma.

Already the news of the arrival of the Queen Clipper had spread, and early as was the hour, a considerable concourse of people had come to see the aerial wonder.

Frank and his friends were greeted with cheers, and the words of praise and commendation he



heard on all sides, was very pleasant to the young inventor.

But pausing only long enough to make a short speech, upon which the admiring crowd insisted, Frank and his companions went on to the city.

And shortly after their departure, Smith Brown stole away and also made his way to the Mormon metropolis.

Reaching the city, Smith Brown went directly to the nearest drug store, and fifteen minutes later he was on his way back to the aerial ship laden with a box containing certain purchases he had made at the drug store.

Smith Brown was back at his post on board the air-ship before any of the crew who were in charge

up to the bar, and a sigh of contentment escaped the Irishman, as he murmured:

"Give us a bit av ould mountain dew."  
"Yas. Dat's right, an' a little gin an' lasses fo' me, sah," added Pomp.

The presiding genius behind the bar was a dandy dispenser of liquid hardware. His locks were oiled, his mustache waxed, and a glass diamond, the size of a hen's egg adorned his shirt front.

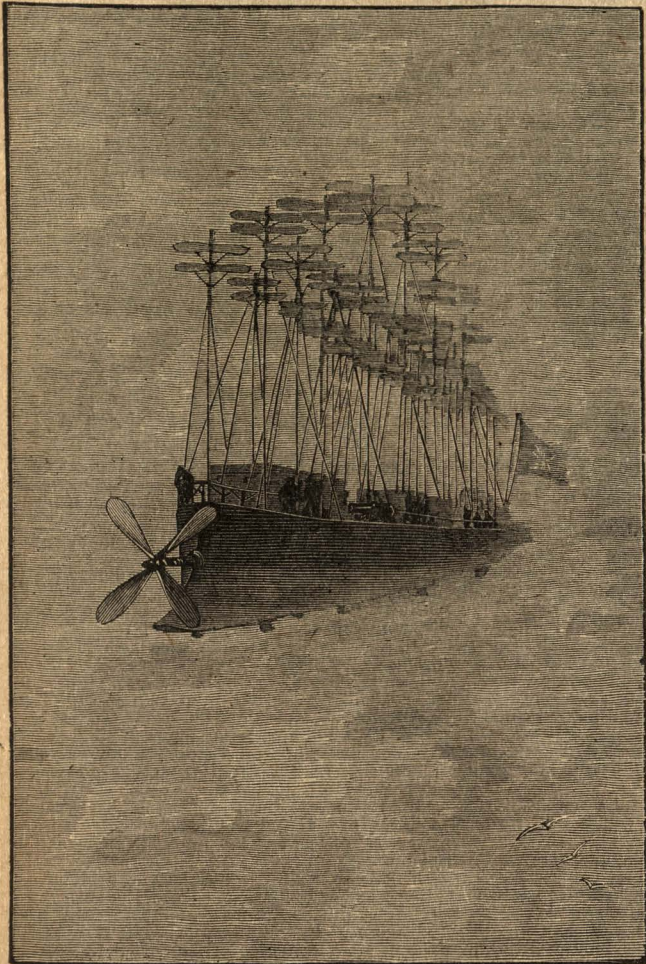
Turning from a group of men at the lower end of the bar, he placed the poison named before Barney and Pomp, and they helped themselves to swimming glasses.

The dose was repeated several times, while the

lieve to have been abducted by the Mormons, and taken to a new settlement the 'Latter Day Saints' have established, beyond the jurisdiction of the United States government, in New Mexico. If you will try to rescue my daughter the prayers of a grateful mother will always be offered for you and yours. Here is my daughter's photograph."

The lady paused in her rapid utterances, and placed the photograph of a beautiful and innocent looking girl in the young inventor's hands.

"Madam," said Frank, gravely. "My present aerial voyage is merely one of adventure, and for the purpose of testing my new air-ship; I am at your service. Now tell me, if you can, how to find the Mormon settlement in New Mexico."



The Queen Clipper was made to attain a lofty elevation, and soon the wonderful aerial vessel was sailing majestically along among the fleecy clouds.



Barney stood at the wheel looking intently ahead, when two dark shadows fell upon the side of the glass wheelhouse.

of the vessel had noted his absence, since there had been no occasion for his services.

Frank Reade, Jr., made the purchase of a quantity of provisions and other supplies in the city, and while Frank and the doctor were busy giving their orders in a large grocery establishment Barney whispered to Pomp:

"Whist a bit, me gossoon. Lave us give Masther Frank the slip till we cut the dust out av the throats av us wid a sup av Mormon red eye."

"Golly, Barney, you'se done hit dis yere colored population right whar he lives! Whar am de nearest distillery?" responded Pomp.

"Begob, I got the two eyes av me on a saloon a bit back. We'll be afther makin' for the same, sure," said Barney, and he slipped out of the store, followed by Pomp.

"Gollie! Can't yer struck a distillery?"

"Faith an' I can't, then. Do yez want the earth, nagur?"

"No, sah, Irish. But I'se so dry dat I'se lookin' fo' a wholesale place."

"Be the powers av turf! It's the same complaint I have."

"Well, heah am de promised lan' fo' de dry."

"Be the harp av Tara niver a truer word did yez spake," said Barney, entering the saloon, the door of which they had reached.

"Gollie! It's sated we am dis time fo' suah," remarked Pomp, and then he and Barney ranged

dandy bartender looked on in speechless wonder.

"S'cuse us, sah," said Pomp draining the fourth glass. "We only gits a chance to take a buff once a yeah. Thanks fo' de towel; we don't use soap," and Pomp wiped his capacious mouth on the towel on the hook under the bar-rail.

At that moment the voice of Frank Reade, Jr., was heard calling.

"Barney! Pomp! Where are you?"

Barney threw a two-dollar note on the bar, and he and Pomp flitted.

They joined the young inventor and the doctor at the store door, and Frank regarded them a trifle suspiciously, for both were munching a handful of cloves, which they had snatched as they vanished from the sight of the paralyzed dandy barkeeper.

Frank and his companions were on their way back to the air-ship when they met a handsome middle-aged lady dressed in mourning.

Much to Frank Reade's surprise the lady addressed him, saying:

"I believe, sir, you are the celebrated inventor, Frank Reade, Jr."

"Yes, madam," replied Frank.

"I recognized you from your portrait, as published in the illustrated newspapers, and knowing you are always ready to help the weak against the strong, and champion the cause of right and justice, I have made bold to address you. I am a

widow, my name is Marion Santell. I have a daughter, aged sixteen, called Bessie, whom I be-

lieve to have been abducted by the Mormons, and taken to a new settlement the 'Latter Day Saints' have established, beyond the jurisdiction of the United States government, in New Mexico. If you will try to rescue my daughter the prayers of a grateful mother will always be offered for you and yours. Here is my daughter's photograph."

The lady, after fervently thanking Frank, went on to give him certain directions as to the location of the Mormons in New Mexico, which she had gathered from a letter she said she had received from a Mormon elder who had some time previously openly sought to induce her to join the colony with her daughter.

"Now we have a new purpose. We will lose no time in getting under way," said Frank then, and saying a few encouraging words to the bereaved mother, he and his companions went on to the Queen Clipper.

Soon after they went on board the supplies Frank had purchased arrived. These were taken on deck and stored away. Meantime the tank was filled with fresh water. Everything being ready for an extended voyage the vessel was soon under way, and Frank set the course for New Mexico.

Having been for some time on short rations of drink the potatoes which he had indulged in that day soon proved too much for Barney, and he crawled into an empty hoghead on deck to sleep off the effects of the liquor, hoping thus to escape being found out by Frank.

Pomp wasn't nearly as much under the influence as Barney. He saw Barney crawl into the hoghead, and then his mouth expanded into a grin.

"Yah! yah! Irish got drunk. I'se a-gwine ter hab some fun wid him now fo' suah," thought Pomp, and stealing up to the barrel when he



hought Barney had fallen asleep he began to roll t as fast as he could along the deck.

Barney got a terrible shaking up, and, of course, he was wide awake in a moment. But Pomp kept the hoghead revolving so rapidly that he couldn't get out.

"Let me out! Begob I'll break the head av yez! Worra! Worra! I'm turned inside out! Stop the barrel! Faith an' I'll have the life av yez!" roared Barney, kicking lustily at the sides of the hoghead.

"Yah! Yah!" laughed Pomp. "Yer don't seem ter'preciate dis free ride. Yer welcome, no charge. Yah! Yah!"

"It's the nagur! Now, be heavens, I'll have the blackguard's gore! Is an Irish gentleman to be insulted be a nagur? No, begob! I'll make the spalpeen sick whin I git out. Worra! Be the powers av turf I'll knock him to the land where the shamrock grows!" yelled Barney.

But Pomp kept the barrel in motion.

As long as he did so Barney was a prisoner.

"Yah, I've got de dead wood on yer dis time, Barney. What will yer gib me ter stop the barrel?" said Pomp.

"Sure, an' I'll give yez a Donnybrook fiver!"

"A fiver. Gollie, dat will buy a new plug hat to wear back to Readestown. Is yer in earnest, Irish?"

"Begob, I was niver more in earnest in all me life, nagur."

"Den it's a go. I'll luff you out fer dat fiver."

Pomp stopped the hoghead, and Barney scrambled out.

"Now, gib me dat fiver," said Pomp, as soon as Barney was clear of the hoghead.

"There you are. A rare Donnybrook fiver. Just as I was afther promisin' av yez," said Barney, and as he spoke he gave Pomp a blow in the face with his "bunch of fives" that made the darky drop and see stars.

"Begob, and the nagur was niver born that could outwit an Irishman! Long loife til the loikes av me, but it's aven I am wid the nagur for the ride in the barrel," said Barney.

Put Pomp was on his feet in a moment, and he ducked his head and ran at Barney. The Irishman avoided him, however, and gawking the bow cabin rushed in and secured the door.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE JOURNEY RESUMED—CAPTURED—"BURN THE AIR-SHIP TO ASHES!"

THE Queen Clipper was made to attain a lofty elevation, and soon the wonderful aerial vessel was sailing majestically along among the fleecy clouds.

In the stern turret Smith Brown, having fastened the door so that he could not by any chance be seen, unwrapped the package he had purchased at the drug store in Salt Lake City.

Then a large bottle labeled "chloroform" was disclosed.

"Ah, ha! this will be useful yet to enable me to win a bloodless victory when the favorable time comes for making the seizure of the air-ship. Now, counting Hall and Beam and Driggs, there are four of us against Frank Reade, Jr., and his six men. Blake is a friend of Hall's. I may yet win him over to join the mutiny."

Muttering further to the same purpose, the crazy inventor unlocked his chest, and, having put the bottle of chloroform in it, he relocked the receptacle and seated himself at the levers of the engine employed to drive the stern propelling screw. Then he fell into a reverie, and presently he again formulated his thoughts into muttered words.

"Ah, I was alarmed when I saw the dead aeronauts whom we found in the drifting balloon, for I knew them both well, and to Payne, who was a personal friend, I some time since gave my photograph with my name written on it. I feared lest that photograph might be found on Payne or among his effects. In that event my identity would have been discovered. Frank Reade would surely have recognized me as the original of it," said the crazy scientist.

The voyage of the air-ship continued to be a pleasant one. Beam, the Yankee, relieved Blake at the wheel in the glass house, and from time to time Barney, who wished to learn to steer the vessel, took a "trick" at the wheel also.

Night came on with a brilliant moon illuminating the way of the aerial vessel. Barney stood at the wheel looking intently ahead, when two dark shadows fell upon the side of the glass wheel-house.

Barney turned and saw Zeke Beam the Yankee, and Ben Driggs, on the deck just outside the steersman's glass observatory.

From the first Barney had taken a dislike to the two villains, and he yet regarded them with distrust, though he had kept his opinions to himself, observing how Frank seemed to be pleased with the pair.

Barney saw that the two men were conversing intently, and he tried to overhear what they said.

Presently, as Beam and Driggs moved away, he heard the former say:

"The Queen Clipper will be a great prize."

"Arrah! Now what does that mane? Sure, an' I don't know but I don't like the sound av it. Faith, and I'll kape an eye on yez, me fine laddy bucks, an' if it's any divilment yez are up to, yez will run against an Irishman about my size," said Barney, mentally.

In a comparatively brief period of time, owing to the unusually rapid speed maintained by Frank's orders, the Queen Clipper was in the vicinity of the Mormon settlement in New Mexico.

The landmarks Mrs. Santell had given Frank Reade proved of great service, and by means of them he experienced little difficulty in locating the settlement in which he hoped to find the stolen girl he had come to rescue.

The night was waning when the settlement was sighted.

Frank ordered a descent, and the Queen Clipper floated downward and at length came to rest upon the earth at the edge of a narrow strip of timber beyond which was the Mormon settlement.

Then after making certain preparations Frank, accompanied by Barney and Pomp, set out for the Mormon town. But first Dr. Vaneyke, who was left in command, was instructed how to proceed should certain events transpire which Frank foresaw might ensue.

Frank and his two faithful servants were armed to the teeth, and each wore a complete suit of mail under their ordinary garments. These suits of armor were bullet proof.

The young inventor and his companions soon arrived at the edge of the Mormon settlement, which consisted of some forty rude log dwellings. The question now was to find out which dwelling sheltered the stolen girl.

The isolated village was silent. No one was to be seen abroad, and only here and there was a light visible in any of the windows.

Frank and his friends were in a dilemma.

While the young inventor was trying to devise some plan to discover the whereabouts of Mrs. Santell's daughter, a fortunate coincidence assisted him. Bessie Santell was attempting an escape that very night. All at once Frank detected a slender female form stealing along in the shadows of the buildings, and coming his way. Presently, as she drew near, he recognized her as the original of the photograph Mrs. Santell had shown him.

In a moment Frank made his presence known to the escaping girl, and explained he had come to rescue her.

Behind a building at the end of the village, the young inventor and his companion stood for a moment or so talking.

Then suddenly a startling event transpired. Out of the very building behind which our friends stood rushed a dozen men.

In an instant Frank Reade, Jr., and his companions were surrounded.

A terrible struggle ensued. The Mormons seemed to wish to capture the inventor and his two servants alive. Desperately as Frank and the two brave fellows with him fought they were overpowered.

Bessie Santell was carried away by a bearded old rascal, who proclaimed himself the chief Mormon elder.

One of the instructions Frank had given Doctor Yadyke was that in case he was caught in the Mormon settlement and needed help he would sound a blast on a hunting-horn which he carried.

As he was overpowered Frank snatched the hunting-horn from his girdle and blew a terrific blast.

He knew those on board the air-vessel could not fail to hear the signal, and he expected that the air-ship would soon come sailing over the town and threaten to bombard it if he was not promptly released with his comrades.

But Frank was marched away to the center of the village by the Mormons, and Pomp and Barney were conducted to the same place, where all three were bound to separate trees.

Meantime, as the young inventor and his comrades were conducted to the center of the town, they heard alarming sounds, which emanated from the direction of the air-ship. There came the detonation of fire-arms, faint yells, and the clang of the alarm-bell on the aerial craft.

"Ha! ho! The saints of New Mexico are smiting the invading Gentiles. The battle will be with the sons of Mormon, and the Gentiles shall be captured together with the unholy craft of the air, which is the work of Satan. And the lamb of the flock, the Gentiles, came from Salt Lake City to take away from the elect of Joseph Smith shall remain with the chosen people," presently said the Mormon chief, who had carried away Bessie Santell, as he came back and confronted Frank Reade, Jr.

Like a flash it dawned upon the young inventor that the Mormons must have received an advance warning, and that they knew all about his coming and his motive in time to arrange to trap him and capture the Queen Clipper.

Frank Reade's heart sank.

Perhaps the expression of his face told that, for the moment he felt despairing, for the old elder went on:

"Of course, there's no escape for you. We are a law unto ourselves here, and there is no other settlement within a hundred miles save a signal station on the railroad twelve miles away where I received this telegram but an hour or so ago, thanks to the fact that the operator is a convert of ours."

Then the old villain read a dispatch from Salt Lake City as follows:

"ELDER COOK, NEW JERUSALEM, NEW MEXICO. 'Have watched Mrs. Santell as you ordered. To-day she met Frank Reade, Jr., who is here with his great air-ship, and engaged him to go to your settlement and bring back her daughter. Look out for Reade, and seize him and destroy his air vessel if you can, or he'll steal the girl Bessie.'"

"SETH MARROON, Mormon Detective."

"Ah! Ha! The telegraph beats even your air-ship for speed!" said the Mormon, exultantly, and at that moment one of his followers dashed up on horseback and announced:

"The air-ship is captured, and all on board are prisoners!"

"Then burn the infernal flying machine to ashes!" ordered the elder.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THRILLING EXPERIENCES—THE FIGHT FOR THE AIR-SHIP.

FRANK READE, JR., turned sick at heart as he heard the terrible news that the air-ship was captured by the Mormons, and that all on board were prisoners.

Barney uttered a fierce Irish exclamation and Pomp cried:

"Mars Frank, it 'pears like we am done gone fo' suah dis time!"

"Burn the infernal flying machine to ashes!" repeated the Mormon elder savagely.

"All right, elder. I'll ride right back to the air-ship, and give my gang your orders. But before we burn the vessel we will unload her. The plunder is valuable," said the man who had brought the news of the capture of the Queen Clipper.

Right! We will enrich ourselves at the expense of the gentiles, who would steal away the ewe lamb of my flock. I will go with you to the captured flying machine," replied the Mormon elder.

"Hold!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., desperately. "You can never find the most valuable portion of my cargo—a fortune in gold—without my assistance."

"Then you shall go with us, and point out the hiding-place of the treasure," said the Mormon.

"Never! unless you first promise to spare my crew and myself, and allow us to sail away in the air-ship, after we have surrendered the treasure," said Frank, determinedly.

"Be the harp av Tara, its mesel, Barney O'Shea, as will fight the best man in the Mormon gang fer the ship!" cried Barney.

"Dat's business! Golly, I've a po' man, but I'd gib suffin' fo' one crack at old baldy's skatin' rink!" Pomp exclaimed in rage.

The Mormon elder was bald-headed, and Pomp's allusion to the fact made the old rascal very angry. Snatching the riding whip, which the horseman carried, the elder rushed at Pomp exclaiming:

"You impudent nigger! I'll flay you alive!"

Pomp tugged desperately at the bonds that held him to the tree. Suddenly they gave way, and the darky was free.

Quick as thought he ducked his head, and darted at the irate old Mormon, who was advancing with the heavy whip raised to strike him.

The succeeding moment the head of the butting darky telescoped the Mormon elder "below the belt," and he doubled up in the middle and shot back on the earth at a distance of some feet.

Pomp snatched a knife from his belt as the Mormon fell, and leaping to Barney cut him loose from the tree. Then he was going to liberate Frank in the same way, when the Mormons, who were near by, came at him.

"Run for it, Barney and Pomp!" shouted Frank, and the brave darky and the Irishman bounded away. They were instantly pursued by a howling mob of Mormons.

But much to the satisfaction of Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp distanced the Mormons, and gaining the timber disappeared in the cover well in advance of their enemies.

The old elder had all the breath knocked out of



his body, but he presently regained his feet, and then he hissed in Frank's face:

"I'll make no terms with you. You shall point out the hiding-place of the treasure on the air-ship, or we'll torture you until you are glad to reveal the secret."

Frank had been thinking rapidly.

All his coolness and presence of mind had now returned, and the escape of Pomp and Barney encouraged him.

The young inventor knew that he could gain nothing, save it might possibly be by some desperate ruse that would surprise and outwit the enemy.

pushed forward until the great gun was trained upon the Mormons on the deck, who had now gathered in a group beside the companionway.

The cannon was loaded.

The man behind it carefully primed it with powder from the ammunition-box on the carriage.

Then he produced a match, and crouched down at the butt of the cannon, as though he was waiting for some signal to fire it.

Meantime, Frank Reade, Jr., reached the battery-room under the central turret, and entered it, closely followed by the old Mormon elder and his four comrades.

"There!" said Frank, indicating a steel bar

battery-room from the central cabin on the deck, in which was situated the engine that ran the suspensory helices.

All at once a voice that thrilled Frank Reade, Jr., to the heart with joy spoke to him down the tube.

"Sure, Mas her Frank, we have the blackguards surrounded, has mesel' and Pomp. Whist till yez hear the big gun."

"Barney by all that's good!" exclaimed Frank.

Barney it was indeed.

The dark forms, that had stolen on board, while the cloud hid the face of the moon, were Barney and Pomp.

It was Barney who entered the central turret



The anchor rope was made fast to the tub in such a manner that it could not possibly loosen, and Pomp was lowered in the tub to the water. Of course the darky had a cold bath.



The Queen Clipper encountered a storm, and for a time she was in great danger avoiding the broken rocky peaks where some chaotic upheaval, probably occasioned by volcanic action in ages past, had heaped the great, great mountain masses in strange, grotesque shapes.

Frank was hurried away by his captors to the air-ship in a few moments.

His heart sank again upon arriving there and seeing Dr. Vaneyke and all the crew bound hand and foot in a line along the rail.

Ten Mormons were on board the Queen Clipper. "Now, then, show us the treasure," ordered the old elder, and Frank was marched on board the air-ship.

"If I must I must," groaned Frank, pretending to yield, but secretly now intent upon a most daring stratagem. He led the way down the companion stairs.

The old elder and four of the Mormons followed him.

Ten of the enemy remained on deck and the others were all around the air-ship.

As Frank Reade, Jr., descended the companion-way, the moon was momentarily obscured by a heavy bank of dark clouds, and the night suddenly darkened.

While this transitory gloom ensued, two dark forms that had crept up to the air-ship under cover of the prairie grass gained the deck of the Queen Clipper undetected.

One of the forms went stealthily into the central cabin.

The other crept to the cannon, which stood beside the stern cabin. A pair of massive shoulders were set against the carriage, and it was cautiously

fixed horizontally at the end of a perpendicular rod set in the floor, and which looked as if it might be intended to lift a section of the flooring. "Raise the section of the floor the rod is fixed in, and you will find the treasure. Come, all together; it's a heavy lift."

He pretended to seize the crossbar, but, in reality, he was careful not to bring his hands in contact with it. The old elder and the four other Mormons seized the bar and lifted.

The next moment there were five insensible Mormons on the floor. They had received a terrible electric shock, as Frank had intended.

"Now for the others on deck!" he said, as he appropriated a pair of loaded revolvers belonging to one of the fallen Mormons.

Frank turned to connect a coil of wire with the wonderful battery, intending to wind it around the metal stairs leading from the deck, and then call the other Mormons. In that case every one of them who stepped upon the stairs would be shocked senseless.

But all at once Frank paused, astounded.

"Surely I hear the whirr of the suspensory helices!" he exclaimed.

He listened again for an instant.

There was no mistake. The suspensory helices were really revolving like lightning, and the Queen Clipper began to ascend.

There was a speaking tube running down to the

and who had now started the suspensory helices, turning on the full current from the powerful batteries.

It was Pomp, of course, who was ready to discharge the cannon.

As The Queen Clipper began to ascend, Pomp discharged the cannon. It was loaded with grapeshot, and the Mormons on the deck were mowed down by the terrible volley.

Six of the ten lay upon the deck when the smoke lifted. The four survivors came charging at Pomp, and the Mormons on the earth dashed at the air-ship as it shot skyward.

The Queen Clipper was beyond the reach of the party on the earth in an instant.

At that moment Frank sprang upon deck through the companion-way with a revolver in each hand, and opened fire on the four Mormons, who were charging at Pomp. Two of the wretches fell, as Frank simultaneously discharged a shot from each of his weapons.

Pomp hurled a cannon-ball at the others, and knocked down one of them. The other snapped his gun at Pomp, but the weapon hung fire, and the next instant the darky placed the last one of the enemy hors de combat by butting him out of time.

"Whoop!" yelled Barney, darting out of the central cabin, and beginning to dance a reel,



"Ireland for iver! We hould the ship! Pomp, yez are a black diamond."

"Gollie! We's de bosses ob de skitvations! Bress de Lawd, we's got de bulge on dem yere white trash at las!" cried Pomp.

And in his delight he began to hoe down his brogans in an old Virginia breakdown, true plantation style.

Frank ran to his captive crew, and began to cut them loose.

Meantime the Mormons on the earth below yelled and discharged volley after volley of shots at the air-ship. But all their bullets fell short. The Queen Clipper was out of range.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MORMONS COME TO TERMS—POMP TAKES A BATH—THE FRONTIER FORT.

EXPLANATIONS quickly ensued. Dr. Vaneyke stated that soon after Frank Reade, Jr., set out for the Mormon settlement, accompanied by Barney and Pomp, the band who had captured the air-ship dashed upon it, coming from the adjacent timber, under cover of which they had made a close approach undetected.

Of course it was understood by the young inventor and his friends that the telegram sent to the Mormon elder by his spy in Salt Lake City, giving warning of the coming of the air-ship, had caused the crafty old rascal to plan to capture it in the manner which had so very nearly proven successful.

While Dr. Vaneyke and Frank Reade, Jr., were conversing, as the Queen Clipper soared away from the Mormons on the earth below, the former complimented the crew by saying:

"Although the attack by the band from the timber was a complete surprise to us, the men behaved nobly. Every man did his best to defend the ship, and none fought more desperately than Smith Brown. But we were overwhelmed by force of numbers."

Smith Brown chanced to hear the remarks commendatory of his conduct as he passed the doctor and Frank on his way to the stern cabin.

"Ha!" said the crazy inventor, mentally. "It was not to save the Queen Clipper for Frank Reade, Jr., that I fought. No! I battled to protect the aerial vessel for myself. The safety of the air-ship is necessary to the accomplishment of my dream of greatness. With it alone can I make myself the king of the air, and realize the ambition of my life—recognition as the greatest of inventors."

Frank presently ordered the speed of the suspensory helices to be diminished, and the Queen Clipper was allowed to become almost stationary at an elevation of a few hundred feet.

Meantime the Mormon elder and one of the men who had descended with him into the battery-room had survived the shock from the steel bar, which was really the connector of two batteries.

The Mormon elder upon regaining his senses drew a revolver and began to crawl up the companion stairs, when his head came on a level with the deck and he saw that he had been completely outwitted, in desperate fury he raised his weapon and leveled it at Frank Reade who was coming toward the companionway.

"Die, you infernal Gentile, die!" cried the mad-dened Mormon, and upon the instant he pulled the trigger.

Frank Reade involuntarily leaped aside. But his movement was not swift enough to elude the Mormon's bullet.

The ball struck him on the breast and he staggered backward. But he did not fall, and the succeeding moment he sprang upon the vindictive Mormon and disarmed him.

The young inventor's suit of mail had saved his life. Barney and Pomp sprang to Frank Reade's assistance, and the Mormon elder was quickly bound so that he could offer no further violence.

"Let's drop the blackguard overboard!" cried Barney.

"No," replied Frank. "I want to use him to obtain the surrender of Bessie Santell."

The two men whom Pomp had knocked down and butted out of time, had been secured a moment previously, and just then the fellow who with the old elder had survived the electric shock, came on deck. He too was at once seized and bound.

The Mormon elder caught at Frank Reade's remark about Bessie Santell, and he said, quickly:

"Release me. Return me to my people, and you shall have the girl."

"All right. I'll make terms with you," replied Frank, and then he released the elder's hands, and made him write the following note:

"I have agreed to surrender the girl Bessie Santell to the men of the air-ship in exchange for the liberty of myself and surviving comrades. You will all immediately retire to the settlement and send the girl alone to the place where the air-ship stood when you attacked it. Only in this way can my life be saved."

"ELDER COOK."

When this note was written the suspensory helices were further retarded, and the Queen Clipper descended until it was almost in range of the Mormons, who were still at the recent scene of conflict.

Then Frank Reade, Jr., fixed a weight to the note, and dropped it down to the captured elder's followers.

They read the note, and reluctantly retired to the village.

A short time elapsed, and then the captive maiden was seen approaching.

Bessie Santell ran rapidly forward, and the Queen Clipper was made to descend to the earth, and the young girl was taken on board it.

Then the Mormon elder, and those of his men who survived, were allowed to depart unarmed. The dead were removed from the air-ship, and once again it soared away through space, bearing the rescued girl to safety, far from the scene of her hateful captivity.

The voyage back to Salt Lake City was made speedily, and arriving there in safety, the Queen Clipper made a landing, and Frank had the satisfaction of restoring the stolen girl to her bereaved mother's arms.

"Where next, Frank?" asked the Doctor, when the air ship was once more aloft.

"Let's have a look at the Apache country. The red-skins are on the warpath, and making a great deal of trouble for the Government troops. We shall find something to interest us at the scene of hostilities," replied Frank.

The Doctor approved of this, and the course of the air ship was set for Southern Colorado.

Just then Pomp reeled out of the cook's galley. One glance at him told Frank that he was drunk. The young inventor had left the side-board in the dining saloon unlocked by an oversight, and Pomp had made away with a quart of brandy.

Frank resolved to teach Pomp a lesson in sobriety, which he hoped he would not soon forget, and as the dorky fell down beside the door of the cook's galley and curled himself up for a sleep, the young inventor ordered the course of the air-ship to be again changed.

Salt Lake was still in sight. Frank set the course for that inland sea. And then when the Queen Clipper hung over its waters, a large, deep tub was brought on deck, and the dorky was securely bound in it, so he could not fall out. Then the anchor rope was made fast to the tub in such a manner that it could not possibly loosen, and Pomp was lowered in the tub to the water.

Of course the dorky had a cold bath. He was sobered up to a considerable degree, and yelled lustily to be drawn on board.

This was soon done, and when he was safe on deck again Pomp vowed he would not drink brandy again.

But he privately stated to Barney.

"Gollie! Barney, you took notice dat I didn't say nuffin' 'bout whiskey."

The voyage, being again resumed, the Queen Clipper was soon over the mountains of Colorado—a branch of the Rocky range.

During the night, which then came on, the Queen Clipper encountered a storm, and for a time she was in great danger avoiding the broken rocky peaks where some chaotic upheaval, probably occasioned by volcanic action in ages past, had heaped the great, great mountain masses in strange, grotesque shapes.

But the mountains were finally safely passed, and when day dawned a frontier fort was sighted.

It was a lonely log fortress, and the occupants were evidently in danger. A horde of savages, of the Apache tribe, were attacking it.

Frank Reade, Jr., judged that the garrison of the fort had well nigh exhausted their supply of ammunition, for they responded but faintly to the fusillade of bullets which the savages showered upon the stockade.

"Now, then, for action! We'll take a hand in this battle against the murderous redskins!" cried Frank Reade, Jr.

The crew quickly seized their rifles, and Frank and Barney manned the cannon.

Then the Queen Clipper swept downward until it was within range of the Apaches. All at once Frank discharged the cannon loaded with grape-shot, and that was the first the redskins knew of the approach of the air-ship.

The discharge of the cannon was greeted by terrible yells from the redskins, many of whom were slain, and immediately the crew opened fire with their Winchesters.

Zeke Beam and Ben Driggs proved themselves to be excellent marksmen, and so further won Frank's commendation.

The superstitious redskins probably regarded the air-ship as a supernatural enemy, and after the first volley from it they fled in confusion, nor did they pause until they gained the shelter of some timber half a mile distant from the fort.

### CHAPTER XXIV.

AN INDIAN BATTLE—FRANK READE, JR., TAKES A HAND—TREACHERY.

ALMOST at once an officer in the uniform of the United States army appeared on the parapet of the log fort, and as the aeroplane came within hailing distance, he shouted:

"Your assistance came most timely. We have only a few rounds of ammunition left, and we have reason to believe that an army of redskins are on their way here to join the hostiles. If you would save the post, go to Fort Smith, forty miles north, and tell the commander to send us reinforcements."

"It shall be done! Don't despair. I'll carry your message, and return ahead of the troops to further help you, The Queen Clipper of the Clouds is a host in herself," replied Frank.

"Whom have we to thank for our preservation?" then inquired the officer.

"I am Frank Reade, Jr., and this aerial vessel is my latest invention," was the reply.

"Then we will keep up our spirits. We have heard of you, and we feel that we can rely on you to do all you promise in our behalf. The wives and families of the officers of the garrison are here in the fort, so let the thought that you are striving to save innocent women and children from the blood-thirsty savages inspire you," continued the officer.

And then as the ship of the air went speedily on its course northward a rousing cheer for Frank Reade, Jr., and his great invention went up from the imperiled soldiers in the fort.

The young inventor ordered all speed to be made, and the air-craft darted through the air with astonishing velocity.

Frank Reade, Jr., procured his telescope and stationed himself as a lookout to watch for the fort he desired to reach.

It was not long before he saw the stars and stripes floating from a tall flag-staff in the distance.

The Queen Clipper was steered toward it, and a substantial fort of greater size than the imperiled fortress was discerned under the starry flag.

The Queen Clipper swept earthward, and it was seen by those on board her that a considerable force of U.S. cavalry was encamped outside of the fort.

The aerial ship had been discovered by the troopers, and there was considerable excitement among them, while every eye watched the approaching wonder, that seemed to be descending from the sky.

A landing was made as soon as possible by the air-ship, and Frank Reade, Jr., hastened to make known to the commander of the post the situation of the neighboring fort.

Then orders were promptly issued, the bugle call sounded, and the cavalrymen sprang to their saddles and set out at once to go to the relief of the imperiled post.

Frank Reade, Jr., did not delay unnecessarily for a single moment in getting the air vessel under way again, and the Queen Clipper darted off on the return journey with great speed, passing the galloping cavalry force, and quickly leaving the latter out of sight in the distance.

Meantime the Indians had rallied when the Queen Clipper passed out of sight. Once more the savages attacked the fort.

Frank Reade, Jr., and his men heard the report of fire-arms as they neared the fort again, and so they knew the battle there was renewed again.

As before, as soon as the air-ship was near enough, the crew opened fire on the savages, and the cannon was discharged with disastrous results to the Apaches.

But the Indians seemed no longer to regard the air-ship with that superstitious terror which had previously seized them when they beheld it.

The fact was the Apaches were led by a white renegade, an ex-road-agent and desperado, upon whose head the government had set a price. This villain had explained the real character of the air-ship to the red-skins, during its temporary absence.

While the battle went on, and volley after volley of shots was discharged from the air-ship Zeke Beam and Ben Driggs crept away from the others, unobserved.

Beam had recognized the white renegade chief as an old comrade of his and he said to Driggs:

"Now is our time to make sure that Smith Brown does not betray us to Frank Reade, Jr., and also make certain of the plunder on this machine. Dan Kane leads the Indians, and he's our friend. By gosh, we'll fix the air-ship for capture by the reds!"

"Right you are, pard. But how will you do it?"

"We'll throw the suspensory helices partially out of gear, so the ship will slowly sink to the ground."

"I'm with you for that," assented Driggs. Then they entered the central turret.



Just then Barney observed them. As has been shown, the Irishman distrusted them, and had resolved, as he expressed it, "to keep his eye on them."

"The Yankee and his partner hev gone into the center engine-house. Begob, I'm thinking there's something wrong!" said Barney to Frank Reade, Jr., and then he glided toward the turret, which the two desperadoes had entered.

Owing to the almost deafening crash of musketry and the pandemonium of savage yells from the Indians, Frank Reade, Jr., did not hear what Barney said, though the Irishman supposed he had made himself understood.

Gaining the interior of the central cabin Zeke Beam posted his confederate at the door to keep watch, and then he went forward to throw the great driving engine that propelled the screw of the suspensory helices out of gear.

There were twelve double sets of cogs working alternately in a horizontal and perpendicular course in the machinery of the great suspensory engine. Each of these twelve double cogs revolved three of the vertical axes, imparting motion thereby to thirty-six suspensory helices. And there was one extra double cog to revolve the thirty-seventh of the helices.

Zeke Beam knew something about machinery, and he rightly calculated that if he threw all but five or six of the cogs out of gear the vessel would slowly sink.

Of course he could have made the vessel drop instantly by turning off the electricity from the suspensory engine, but then the air-ship would be dashed in pieces, and his own life would probably be lost, as well as the lives of the rest of the crew. Then, too, the electricity might be turned on again soon enough to defeat his nefarious purpose.

But if the cogs were once thrown out of gear the descent of the Queen Clipper could not be checked in time, for it would require a good deal of labor to repair the damage, and again get the suspensory machine in proper running order.

These points Beam had considered, and so he now inspected the machinery to see how he could the soonest accomplish his purpose.

He decided that by inserting a heavy iron bar, which he discovered at hand, in the main shaft of the driving engine, at its junction with the main driving wheel, the sudden application of restraining power, would jump the majority of the cogs out of their grooves. Then the suspensory helices, dependent upon the cogs thus interfered with, must certainly stop.

Beam picked up the iron bar.

At that moment Driggs said in a whisper:

"The Irishman is coming."

"I'll fix him!" replied Beam, and he sprang to the door, and stood just inside it, with the iron bar uplifted ready to strike Barney down if he entered the central cabin.

It was a moment of thrilling importance.

The destiny of the Queen Clipper of the Clouds and all on board it seemed to depend upon what transpired during the few next brief seconds of time.

If Barney fell under the murderous blow which the ex-road-agent and desperado certainly meant to deal him, how could the air-ship be saved?

There were at least three hundred infuriated, blood-thirsty savages on the plain below, ready to charge upon the air-ship the moment it came within their reach.

The firing from the fort had almost ceased, and the cavalry reinforcements were nowhere in sight.

Beam had scarcely gained his position inside the door of the central turret when Barney entered. Then the iron bar in the desperado's hand, descended upon the devoted fellow's skull, and he fell heavily and remained motionless.

Beam bounded to the great engine and thrust the iron bar into the main driving wheel we have described.

Instantly the most of the cogs were thrown out of gear and the Queen Clipper descended rapidly down, down, right among the great band of merciless savages.

#### CHAPTER XXV.

THE GREAT BATTLE—FRANK READE, JR.'S LIFE IN PERIL.

At the moment when the Queen Clipper began to descend Frank Reade, Jr., uttered a cry of consternation and rushed to the central cabin.

Darting through the open door, the young inventor stumbled over Barney's insensible form, and regaining his feet he saw the cause of the fall of the aeronef.

Frank's mechanical knowledge of the central machinery controlling the suspensory helices was such that he saw at once no effort of his could then avail to arrest the aerial craft in its downward course.

He observed the damage accomplished, by the displacement of the complicated cog series, was

such as could only be repaired at the expenditure of considerable time, and labor.

The young inventor did not remain in the central cabin more than a moment.

Then he rushed on deck again, exclaiming as he came:

"We have got to fight for our lives now as we have never fought before! The machinery of central cabin is so damaged by the work of a traitor in our midst that it is useless!"

Meantime Zeke Beam, the Yankee, and Driggs had taken positions close to the rail, and with their rifles in their hands they were in readiness to leap from the air-ship as soon as she touched the earth.

The two scoundrels were very sure that they would be received in a friendly manner by the white renegade leader of the Indians, who was their old comrade.

The savages saw that something was wrong with the aerial craft as it fluttered downward like a great wounded bird.

Exultant yells filled the air, and the voice of the white renegade was heard as he urged his red followers to be ready to charge upon the Queen Clipper the moment it came within reach.

But all at once the white renegade's words were interrupted.

The report of a rifle rang out on board the aeronef, and the renegade leaped into the air and then fell heavily, uttering his death yell, like a real Apache.

Pomp had been trying for some time to pick off the leader of the redskins, and at last the black dead shot had succeeded in so doing.

"Hi! Dat's one fo' our side! Set up anudder target. I see jis gittin' my han' in!" cried the pleased dorky.

The death of the white renegade was a source of awful consternation for Zeke Beam and Driggs.

They were unknown to the Indians and so now they fully shared the peril to which they had doomed the other members of the Queen Clipper's crew.

It was a swift punishment for their crime.

The terror of the two scoundrels was for an instant so intense that it dominated all their faculties, and enthralled them. Speechless, white-faced, and trembling, they looked into each other's faces, and read the same delineation of despair.

But Beam found voice to utter, in a low intense tone:

"Begosh, Driggs, we're in fer it! It's death fer us as well as all the rest now. Heavens! I never thought of this occurrence! Curse the nigger! His death-shot was the worst thing that could happen for us!"

"Yes; it seems we've cut our own throats, as the feller says. But we'll fight like tigers, and so throw off suspicion, if by any chance Frank Reade, Jr., should come out of this fight with us alive."

"I reckon I cracked the Irishman's skull."

"But suppose, Zeke, that he comes to and blows on us?"

"You let Zeke Beam alone to lie out of it. I wish that was all we had to fear."

Almost as he spoke the Queen Clipper struck the earth. The force of the fall produced a severe jar. But the springs under the hull saved the vessel. She bounded up, was relieved of the concussion, and then settled back on the earth.

The vessel sustained no injury by the fall, for the resistant power of the few suspensory helices still revolving, contributed to ease off the shock of contact with the earth.

The Apaches came charging upon the aeronef as it came to rest.

But Frank Reade, Jr., and Pomp, who now manned the cannon, met the yelling legion with a deadly discharge of grape shot, and the rest of the crew with their repeating Winchester rifles supplemented the volley from the big gun in a most destructive manner.

Zeke Beam and Driggs fought as earnestly as any members of the crew, and Frank Reade, Jr., observed that they did so.

Suddenly Frank called the doctor to his place, and the next moment the young inventor disappeared down the companion-way.

He was gone but a moment, and when he reappeared he carried the end of a wire in his hand, and trailing it across the deck he made it fast to the hand-rail.

Frank wore a pair of hand-isolating gloves, for the wire was charged with electricity from his wonderfully powerful batteries.

The moment the wire was connected with the handrail surrounding the deck, of course that light frame became fully charged with electricity, for the action of that subtle, mysterious agent is always instantaneous.

The first volley from the air-ship sent the army of redskins back. But they were only momentarily repulsed. They almost immediately charged again.

The second advance of the Apaches was even

more furious than the first. The red demons seemed determined to gain a footing on the deck of the vessel.

They were keen enough to discern that if they could only bring the conflict to a hand to hand encounter, their victory would soon be assured.

"The redskins must not gain the deck! If they do we are lost!" shouted Frank Reade, Jr.

The second charge of the enemy was met with a rattling volley from the crew of the imperiled aeronef.

But this time the charge was not entirely checked. A score of the most daring warriors, who were in the front ranks of the foe, and who survived the volley, came on.

The repeating rifles worked like lightning, but in an instant a dozen savages were climbing up the sides of the vessel.

Zeke Beam and Driggs clubbed their rifles and dealt telling blows upon the redskins. But several succeeded in getting hold of the rail. Then they would have surely gained the deck, but for the fact that the rail was charged with electricity.

As soon as a redskin laid hands upon the rail, he would utter a terrible yell and fall back, shocked senseless or killed outright.

Two Indians managed to gain the deck by climbing up the stern propeller shaft, and then leaping over the rail without touching it.

Frank Reade, Jr., was in the stern loading the cannon. The two redskins rushed upon him, and he did not see them, for his back was turned in their direction. The noise of the terrible battle drowned the sound of the two redskins' footsteps.

That moment would have been Frank Reade, Jr.'s, last, but for the timely interposition of Zeke Beam and Ben Driggs. They alone saw the two Indians stealing upon the young inventor.

"Now is our chance to make ourselves solid with Frank Reade, Jr., beyond all question! Come on, Ben, and we'll lay out the two reds," said Beam.

Then he and Driggs rushed at the two Indians, who had almost reached Frank.

Beam and his comrade discharged their weapons as they came to save the young inventor.

Their aim was true, and both Indians fell, as they were crouching to leap upon Frank Reade, Jr. Then the latter wheeled about, and seeing the two savages in the throes of death just behind him while Beam and Driggs stood near, with smoking rifles still raised, the young inventor understood that the Yankee and his friend had saved his life.

"A mighty close call, by gosh! But we plugged 'em just in time!" said Beam.

Frank made a grateful rejoinder, but a terrific yell from the savages almost drowned his voice, and he saw the entire force massing for a final onslaught.

"Pomp!" then shouted Frank. "Bring the bomb chest up from the battery room."

"Yes, sah!" replied the dorky, and he sprang down the companion-way.

Pomp almost instantly reappeared, and on his shoulders he carried a case like a steamer trunk.

This he at once deposited on the deck before Frank Reade, Jr.

The latter opened it. The case was filled with bright metallic cones, each set in a separate padded compartment.

"Dynamite bombs?" said the doctor, interrogatively, as he saw the contents of the case.

"No, no," replied Frank.

"What then?"

"Electric torpedoes of my own invention. Each one of these cones contains enough confined lightning to destroy a dozen men. The cones are really double. The interior cone is charged with negative electricity, the external cone with positive. Concussion will unite the currents, owing to a little mechanical contrivance."

The young inventor had no time to say more.

The entire force of savages now came dashing at the air-ship in a grand final charge.

#### CHAPTER XXVI.

THE QUEEN CLIPPER'S NARROW ESCAPE—BARNEY ACCUSES BEAM AND DRIGGS.

THE crash of musketry, the yells of the savages, the shouts of the whites, all the discord of battle again made a wild pandemonium.

The plains became a scene of veritable saturnalia.

Frank Reade, Jr., and his men cast anxious glances in a northerly direction, whence the cavalry from Fort Smith was expected to come.

But they saw nothing of the troopers yet. The main hope of Frank Reade, Jr., and his friends was now based on the arrival of the United States cavalry.

In the event of the failure of that force to speedily arrive, it seemed that the Queen Clipper must fall into the hands of the savages.



The force of Apaches was so overwhelming that, with all his scientific appliances, the young inventor could scarcely hope to hold the savages at bay much longer.

This all understood.

"Merciful Heaven, will the cavalry never come?" groaned Dr. Vaneyke, as his glance swept the northward plains, vainly seeking to obtain a glimpse of the men in blue.

The firing from the fort had almost ceased. While the main body of hostiles were diverted from the assault on the post by the return of the air-ship a number of the Apaches succeeded in firing the fortress.

Soon the garrison would be driven out of their shelter by the consuming flames. Not only did the fate of the aeronef depend upon the arrival of the cavalry, but the salvation of the garrison rested upon the same chance.

Frank Reade, Jr., had a great deal of faith in the power of his new electric torpedoes, and now the time had come to test them.

The young inventor gave Pomp some hurried instructions, and then as the enemy surged upon the Queen Clipper, as though they meant to sweep everything before them, Frank and Pomp began to hurl the wonderful torpedoes.

Right among the howling mass of charging savages the young inventor and the devoted darky flung the torpedoes.

The explosions that ensued were only to be compared with lightning strokes.

The destruction done was terrible, and the great Indian army wavered before it. Not alone was the work of death effectual, but the manner of its accomplishment carried a subtle horror to the minds of the savages.

It seemed to them that they were waging a combat against mysterious and unknown forces, with whom was all the advantage.

Supernatural agency seemed to the savages to be employed against them, and to this supposition, as much as the actual execution done by the electric torpedoes, was the consternation manifested by the hostiles due.

They wavered when the air vessel was almost reached.

"Faster! Faster, Pomp! Let's make the torpedoes shower upon them! It's now or never!" cried Frank, seeing that the crisis had come.

Then, with all the speed possible, he and Pomp sent the explosive cones at the redskins, and the thunder of the reports of the lightning cones, blended in one terrific roar, that sounded like a grand volley from the artillery of the heavens, in some awful thunder storm.

But the issue of the terrible conflict was yet in doubt when the voice of Chief Engineer Sands rang out in a wild, exultant cheer:

"Hurrah! Hurrah! The cavalry! The cavalry!" shouted Sands.

He had discovered the reinforcements coming.

Frank Reade, Jr., followed with an anxious glance the direction in which Sands pointed.

The young inventor then saw the troopers who had just broken out of a belt of timber. The cavalry came galloping down toward the fort at full speed, cheering as they came.

The troopers' drawn sabers glittered menacingly. They were coming at a charge, and the redskins, who had met those bronzed knights of the plains in deadly combat before, well knew what they had to expect.

and the conflagration was soon checked and finally extinguished.

Meantime, Frank Reade, Jr., and the doctor at once gave poor Barney their attention. They were assisted by Pomp, who seemed to feel great anxiety for his old friend and comrade.

Zeke Beam and Driggs also volunteered their services, and assisted Frank and the doctor as well as they could, while the latter worked to revive Barney, who yet lay in a swoon.

"Who could have struck the poor fellow down!

It must have been the rascal who threw the machinery out of gear. Whoever he was, he deserves to be shot. He does, by gosh!" said Beam, in tones of well feigned sincerity.

"True, the scoundrel deserves the severest punishment, and if we can revive Barney he will tell us who the villain is," replied Frank.

"Fo' de Lawd I'm sorry dat I ever done quarrel wid Barney. If dat Irisher gits well, I'll gwine fer to neber quarrel wid him no mo'," said Pomp, seriously.

The efforts of his friends finally resulted as they desired, and Barney was fully restored to his normal faculties. His skull had not been broken, and the doctor said he would soon be all right again.

As soon as Barney could speak he gasped:

"Whisky! A wee drop av the crature!"

He was given a big drink and very soon, when the dose had been repeated a couple of times, Barney got on his feet again.

He was naturally somewhat dazed, but the moment his glance fell upon Beam and Driggs, he remembered he had followed them into the central cabin.

"What has happened, Master Frank?" asked Barney.

Frank explained.

"Arrah! Thin there are the two blackguards av the worruld that threw the machinery out av order and knocked the head off av me!" cried Barney, pointing at Beam and Driggs accusingly.

"It is false!"

"It's a lie!"

The accused men promptly denied their guilt in those forcible terms.

"Barney, I am sure you are in error. These men certainly would not have any motive in dooming the air-ship, since they would be shown no more mercy by the

redskins than ourselves. Besides, they have behaved nobly since the aeronef came to the earth. They helped fight off the Indians, and they saved my life. No, no, Barney, you mean well, but I am positive you have been in some way deceived," said Frank earnestly.

"Tell us why you accuse Beam and Driggs?" the doctor asked of Barney.

"Faith and I saw thim sneak intil the center cabin, and I folleyed thim. Thin the nixt thing I knew, begob, I didn't know nothing."

"Ah, I see, Barney thought we went into the center cabin, but we did not. I remember, however, that just before the air-ship sank Driggs and



Some hours later, owing to the high rate of speed that was maintained, the aeronef was over the snow-clad Rocky Mountains of the far northwest. The scene was a grand and impressive one as the Queen Clipper passed through a great defile, with the jagged, whitened peaks and frowning battlements all around it.

They hesitated but for a moment, and then, having discharged a parting volley at the Queen Clipper, they retreated in a southerly direction, where some low hills seemed to offer them a shelter, where pursuit by the cavalry would be difficult.

The cavalry swept by the air-ship in pursuit of the Indians. But a division of the troopers halted at the fort. The garrison was working heroically to extinguish the flames, for there was an excellent well inside the stockade, which supplied plenty of water.

The cavalymen, who halted at the fort, promptly seconded the efforts of the garrison to save the post.



I crossed from one side of the deck to the other, and passed directly by the door of the center cabin," said Beam.

Just then one of the crew who had been below rushed on deck and shouted:

"Hall has broken out of the room he was confined in in the hole, and he is in the magazine!"

"Ha! The mystery is explained, I think. It was Hall who threw the machinery out of gear and struck down Barney!" said Beam.

"It must be so," assented Frank.

Barney was not convinced. But he said:

"Sure, an I didn't see who hit me. But, begob, it's me belave yet that thim two min are the thaves av the worruld that did it."

"Nonsense, Barney! Get that idea out of your head as soon as possible," replied Frank. Then he gave orders to have Hall secured again. Hall was captured and locked up as before. Meanwhile Frank gave his attention to the damaged machinery.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE QUEEN CLIPPER REPAIRED—A WONDERFUL RAILWAY PROJECT—NORTHWARD.

FRANK READE, JR., presently found that not only had the majority of the cogs of the central driving machine been thrown out of gear, but that several of them had been broken.

Now, indeed, the inventor would have found himself in a sad dilemma, had he not the foresight to provide for such an accident.

Among the supplies on the air-ship were a number of sets of cogs, exact duplicates of those used in the suspensory driving engine.

Frank had the required number of those cogs brought up from the supply chamber, and assisted by the crew, including Smith Brown, who now showed great intelligence and skill, the labor of getting the machinery in order again progressed.

But some twelve hours elapsed before everything was adjusted satisfactorily.

While engaged in the work on the central engine Frank conversed at some length with Dr. Vaneyke, and the old scientist proceeded to broach a surprising project, which it seemed he had considered for some time.

"Frank, I want to obtain your promise in advance to consider something that I am about to state, seriously, before you make light of it," said the doctor.

"Very well, I promise," replied Frank, feeling somewhat curious.

"You probably remember that at the death of my old scientific comrade, Von Kempje, I came into possession of all his private scientific papers?"

"Yes," replied Frank.

"Well, among those documents I found certain maps and plans, together with the statement explaining a wonderful railway project, which Von Kempje had devoted much time to the study of."

"Indeed? What is the project?"

"Nothing less than an astonishing scheme to connect the western and the eastern continents by rail, and thus entirely do away with the long and perilous sea voyages which are now necessary."

"Impossible!"

"Not at all—at least, not according to the theory advanced by Von Kempje."

"Well, I should like to hear that theory explained."

"That is precisely what I am about to go into. Briefly Von Kempje proposed to run a railway from Denver, Colorado, northward along the western border of North America to the shores of Behrings Straits."

Frank looked deeply interested.

"At that point, as you know, but a narrow channel separates the Western Continent from Kamtschatka, the nearest land of the Eastern Continent. Von Kempje proposed to run a sort of ferry across the channel, so connecting the American railway with a line to be constructed across Kamtschatka and Siberia to St. Petersburg, the capital of Russia."

"But the difficulties; think of the intense cold and the great snow storms that would cover the tracks in winter," objected Frank at once.

"Von Kempje has provided for all that. He proposes to run electric engines, so saving fuel, and, in order to keep the road clear, establish clearing stations every five miles to be supplied with snow plows and small electric engines to draw them. He claims that the saving in the cost of fuel by employing only electricity as the motive power, will more than compensate for the extra expense of keeping up the clearing stations."

Frank was silent for a moment as the doctor paused, and then he said:

"The scheme begins to assume a plausible look to my mind; but has Van Kempje ever inspected the country through which his wonderful railway must run?"

"It seems not entirely. And now I propose, since in the air-ship we have a vehicle that will en-

able us to proceed with advantages no other explorers ever possessed, that we undertake to inspect the route of this greatest of all railway projects."

"I am quite agreeable. But I am almost certain at the outset that we shall find obstacles and difficulties that Von Kempje has not foreseen or provided for."

"At least," replied the doctor, "we can satisfy ourselves as to the possibility of such a railway, and if we could become its projectors what an achievement for ourselves and what a benefit to two continents would accrue."

"True, true," assented Frank.

"And after all, is this great international railway any more to be wondered at than that you have solved the problem of navigating the air, or that a tunnel should be constructed through the heart of Mont Blanc? The telephone and the telegraph were sneered at when they were first projected. So with all great innovations and inventions. The public is ever skeptical, but once convinced, they are at your feet."

"I see," replied Frank, "that you favor the scheme of Von Kempje. We will consider it decided that we proceed northward."

There was further conversation, and then, as soon as the Queen Clipper was in sailing order, the voyage was resumed.

The air-ship sailed due north, and the soldiers gave the sky-voyagers a hearty cheer as they floated away before a favorable wind.

Some hours later, owing to the high rate of speed that was maintained, the aeronef was over the snow-clad Rocky Mountains of the far northwest.

The scene was a grand and impressive one as the Queen Clipper passed through a great defile, with the jagged, whitened peaks and frowning battlements all around it.

The Queen Clipper, after passing the 50th parallel, entered upon a new atmospheric sea. Though it was summer the air was cold, and as the aerial vessel skirted along the seaboard, passed Vancouver's Island and Sitka, the fog from the Northern Ocean, drifting landward, frequently enveloped the aeronef.

The fog interfered materially with the observations which the explorers desired to make, and so the vessel was steered further inland.

The pathless forests of British America had been passed, and the explorers had seen more of the far Northwest than any traveler who ever preceded them, when one day they came in sight of what seemed under the brilliant sunlight to be a mountain of fire.

But closer observation showed that the burning mountain was really a mass of shining rock, crystalline in its formation, and so reflecting the sun's rays wonderfully in all directions.

A landing was made near this singular mountain, and Frank and the Doctor went to inspect it. Barney and Pomp followed them.

As near as the young inventor's observation at sunrise that morning had enabled him to compute his location, The Queen Clipper was at about 65 deg. north latitude, or not far south of the Arctic circle.

Leaving the young inventor and the doctor to investigate the mountain phenomenon, Barney and Pomp went on in search of game. But Frank charged them both not to go far away from the air-ship.

North of the "Fire Mountain," as Frank had already named it, the hills were timbered, and in the light snow that filled the defiles even at that season, Barney and the darky presently discovered the tracks of a bear.

"Begob, an' it's bear steak we'll order for dinner. Come on wid ye, nagur, till we kill the bear," said Barney.

"I'se wid yer. Gollie, dis am suffin' like huntin'. None ob yer small game fer dis chile. I'se done got tired ob shootin' at squirrels and sich roun' Readestown," said Pomp.

"Why didn't yer hunt yerself, nagur?"

"What you mean by dat remark, sah?"

"Nothin', sure, only I was afther thinkin' there was always a coon around when you were."

"Youse tink yer smart, don't yer?"

"Whist! Look at the loikes av him!" cried Barney.

They were in a defile, at some distance from Fire Mountain, when the above recorded conversation transpired.

As he spoke Barney pointed up the pass.

Then both caught a glimpse of a great polar bear.

The polar bear is the largest and most powerful carnivorous beast. A full grown male measures four feet around each arm at the shoulders. With one blow of his tremendous paw, armed with black claws curved like sickles and hard as iron, he can tear all the flesh from the side of a four thousand pound walrus, or crush in the skull which would glance a bullet.

Barney and Pomp crept up to get a shot at the bear.

Both fired at once.

The bear was only wounded, and, with an enraged growl, he wheeled and charged upon the venturesome hunters. They took to their heels at once. But Barney stumbled and fell at the edge of an abyss. Pomp pitched head first over his fallen companion, and then the bear pounced upon them. As they scrambled to get out of the reach of his claws they slipped and went over the edge of the precipice, and the bear came sliding after them.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE BEAR SLAIN—SMITH BROWN SECURES ANOTHER ALLY.

BARNEY and Pomp landed in a snow bank at the bottom of the abyss after a fall of fifty feet, and they were both buried out of sight in the drift.

The great polar bear came down on top of the two hunters, and while the huge animal was floundering about in the snow, Pomp and Barney succeeded in scrambling out of the drift.

They had fallen into a ravine that ran in a southerly direction, and as that was the course of the air-ship, the Irishman and the darky took to their heels and ran down the defile at full speed.

The bear presently caught sight of them, and came in pursuit. But the hunters had obtained an excellent start, and they did not pause until they reached the Queen Clipper.

The great bear came on until he discovered the air-ship. Then he halted and finally turned and trotted away. Just then Frank and Dr. Vaneyke emerged from among the rocks that formed the wonderful Fire Mountain.

The bear saw them and with an angry growl the ferocious animal charged straight at them.

Frank and the doctor were both armed with repeating Winchester rifles.

Instead of retreating, they stood their ground and both took careful aim at the bear as he came on.

It is a difficult matter to kill a polar bear with a rifle ball. The great beast's hide is exceedingly thick, and the dense fur which covers it is a further protection against the hunter.

The eye and the point just inside the left fore-shoulder are about the only surely vulnerable points in the animal.

"I'll aim for the eye!" said Frank.

"And I for the left fore-shoulder, where a bullet will reach the heart," replied the doctor, for both knew the points that must be hit to slay bruin.

They fired almost simultaneously.

The result was just what they desired. The great white bear fell, and uttering terrible roars began to claw up the earth in its furious death throes.

Then Frank fired again, and put the ferocious beast out of his misery.

Meantime Barney and Pomp came running from the Queen Clipper again, and as soon as the bear ceased to struggle they set to work to remove the pelt.

"It seems to me the bear gave you and Pomp a lively race, Barney," said Frank.

"Sure an' he didn't thin. He gave the nagur a race, but not mesel'."

"How is that? I am sure you both put your best foot forward to keep ahead of the bear."

"Faith an' it was only the nagur that was runnin' away from the bear."

"What were you running for?"

"I was trying to catch the nagur."

"Nonsense!"

"Be the powers av turf, devil a word av a lie is there in it at all, at all. Sure an' I was afther tryin' to kape the nagur from makin' a coward av himself, because he wuz a frind av mine. Faith an' I meant to catch him and hould him till we kilt the bear."

Frank and the doctor laughed.

"Very heroic on your part, Barney," said the doctor.

Pomp resented being called a coward.

"See here, Irish! I doan' low no man wid a white face ter call dis colored pussen a coward! No, sah, an' I ain't er gwine fer ter stan' nuffin' like dat frum no Irish nigger!" said Pomp.

"Be the shamrock! is it a nagur yez call the loikes av me? Faith, an' if yez want a ruction yez kin have it. Be the harp av Tara, an Irishman niver yet took a dare from a nagur," cried Barney, and off came his coat.

"Keep yer close on, Irish," said Pomp.

"Sure, an' I know I naden't takethim off to fight a nagur. But, begob, it's two warrum I am."

"Turn off de steam, fo' you done bust a biler!"

"Nagur, don't yez try to be funny wid me. Come on, now, an' foight like an Irish gentleman."

"Dat's all right. But Ise a colored gentleman, an' I never goes back on buttin', and de razor am



de weapon ob all fur dis pusson when it comes right down to cūttin' acquaintances."

"Now that will do. You put on your coat, Barney, and if you can't keep cool any other way go bury yourself in the snow. I'll have none of your ructions now," said Frank.

"Put the Irisher on ice," said Pomp.

"Silence!" cried Frank. "Come, get the bear dressed, and bring the meat on board at once. We propose to start on our voyage again as soon as possible."

"Yes, sah," replied Pomp, meekly.

"Just as yez say, sure, Masther Frank," said Barney.

Frank and the doctor went on board the Queen

Then he put his lips to the keyhole, and whispered:

"Hall! Hall!"

"Who is there?" demanded the captive.

"Hist! Not so loud. I am Smith Brown. I come as a friend, and no one must know of my visit."

"What is your motive? Will you help me escape?"

"Yes," replied Smith Brown.

"Then welcome. A thousand times welcome."

"I have skeleton keys with me. I will now open the door," said the insane professor. He set to work at once, and in a moment or so unlocked the door and entered the room.

"Yes. There is no doubt of that," Smith Brown hastened to say.

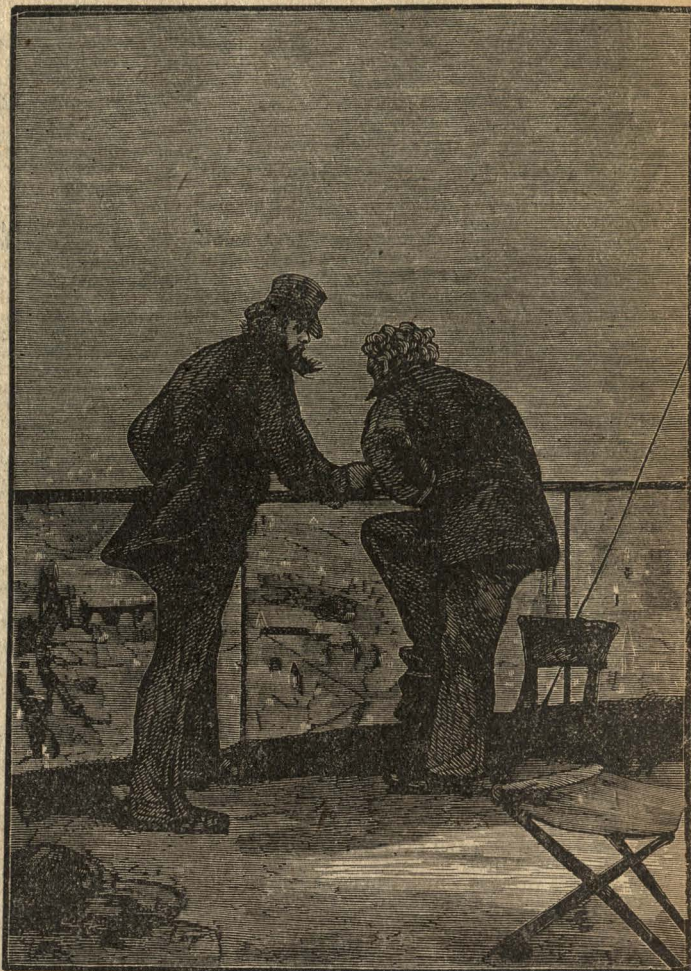
"And I am determined to escape. I will not accept the punishment of the law, which I do not merit. So I'll join hands with you," said Hall, earnestly.

"Bravo! But now let me say, I've a strange project on foot to so work upon the superstitions of the crew and their belief in the supernatural, that I hope some of them, at least, may be led to desert, and so leave the Queen Clipper short-handed, and by reducing the number of those against us, make our victory more easy when we seize the ship," replied Smith Brown.

"What is it that you propose to do?"



A whirlpool where the animal sank sent up a great wave, and the water dashed over the deck. For a moment the Queen Clipper was in great peril. But seizing a hatchet Barney severed the line with a blow.



Zeke Beam and Ben Driggs were standing beside the rail on deck, away from all the others, and as they watched the flickering lights of the city below, they conversed in low and earnest voices.

Clipper, and Pomp and Barney worked away peacefully until the bear was dressed.

Then they brought the meat on board, and Pomp served up bear steak for dinner.

The course of the vessel, whose voyage was immediately resumed, was now for Behring Strait.

The succeeding night, when all save the engineer and helmsman slept, Smith Brown crept from his station in the stern cabin and stole across the deck to the companionway. No one observed his movements, and being satisfied of that, he descended the companion stairs.

"Now to see Hall, and learn if he will join me, and help me wrest the Queen Clipper from Frank Reade, Jr. Ah, ha! Every day now brings me so much nearer the goal of my life. Soon shall Leonidas Wickersham be king of the air, and captain of the Queen Clipper of the Clouds," muttered the crazy professor.

Then he made his way silently to the small compartment in the hold where Hall was confined.

Reaching the door, the maniac paused for a moment and listened. Then he heard Hall pacing up and down his prison-room.

"He is awake. So much the better. I'll make my presence known, and then open the door and go in," said the maniac plotter to himself.

Having closed and locked the door again Smith Brown said:

"I come to make you a proposition. The Queen Clipper of the Clouds is the result of ideas of my own, in the working out of which the boyish inventor, this upstart Frank Reade, Jr., forestalled me. But the vessel shall be mine. The spirits of the air tell me I shall succeed! Will you help me seize the vessel?"

"What! Do you mean to organize a mutiny?" "Yes, and I have two of the crew pledged to help me already. You, with myself, make four against Frank Reade, Jr., and five. With such small odds and the advantage of a surprise on our side we shall succeed. Then, too, if all goes well when the hour of revolt comes Frank Reade, Jr., and perhaps others who are against us shall be powerless. I have a bottle of chloroform on board."

Smith Brown's face worked nervously. His eyes flashed, and in anticipation, he enjoyed all the triumph which his fancy painted.

When he paused, Hall rejoined:

"Frank Reade, Jr., has wronged me, and he will yet do me a still greater injury by having me convicted of a crime of which I am innocent, if he is permitted to convey me back to Readestown."

"The most of the work in this project will fall to you. You are to leap overboard and afterward your spirit is to haunt the ship, and warn the crew that certain destruction awaits them if they do not leave it."

"Are you mad?" demanded Hall, as he heard the astounding words which Smith Brown uttered in the most matter-of-fact way.

"Not at all. But you accepted my words too literally. I mean the crew are to believe you have leaped overboard and perished, while in truth you are still concealed on the Queen Clipper masquerading as a ghost."

"Oh, now I understand, and as it seems to me the project may serve the end we have in view, I am willing to play my part," said Hall.

"Then I will explain the ruse more explicitly," replied Smith Brown, and he went on so to do at some length.

Half an hour later the crazy professor left Hall and relocked the door of the prison-room as he had found it. The two men had come to a full understanding, and the development of a startling mystery would soon ensue.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

## BARNEY AND HALL—HALL'S THREAT—TOWED BY A MONSTER WHALE.

MEANTIME, as we have intimated, Barney was not convinced that Beam and Ben Driggs were innocent of the assault upon himself and the injury done to the Queen Clipper at the frontier fort.

The Irishman had always liked Hall, and he could not bring himself to think that the steersman had struck him down in the central cabin, or attempted to betray the vessel of the clouds into the hands of the Indians.

Accordingly, on the day after the night which witnessed the secret visit of Smith Brown to Hall's prison room, Barney went down in Pomp's place to carry Hall his breakfast. Since the steersman's imprisonment the duty of serving him with food had devolved upon Pomp.

Barney volunteered to take Hall his breakfast because he wanted to talk with the steersman, and if possible convince himself positively as to whether he had been on deck since his confinement or not.

Barney placed the food before Hall, and then he said:

"Sure an' they say yez was afther throwing the machinery out av order whin we were fightin' the red nagurs, an' bedad, they say, too, that yez was the mon who knocked the head off av me."

"That is false. I have not been on deck once since my imprisonment. When I broke out of this room I went no further than the bulkhead in the stern."

Hall's tones were earnest and indignant. "Begob I didn't believe yez would be afther tryin' to kill an old friend," said Barney.

"I swear I have told you the truth," said Hall. Barney was convinced and he said:

"Every wan is ready to kick a man whin he's down, so the blame was put on yerself, Hall. Begob now I'm sure yez are innocent, faith an' I'll prove it on the two villains I suspect yet. But it's clare proof I must have or Masther Frank won't listen til me."

Barney left Hall then. As he was turning away the prisoner said:

"I'm desperate, Barney. I am innocent of what I'm accused of, and if I should take my own life yet, do not be surprised. If I do so, I'll surely return to haunt this air-ship, and yet lead it to destruction."

"Whist, mon! Don't be afther talkin' loike that! Begob, an' yez frighten me. Sure an' I'm inclined to think meself, afther all, that yez never stole Sands' money," replied Barney.

"Thank you for that, Barney," said Hall.

Barney went on deck much troubled by what Hall had said last. He and Pomp were talking about it earnestly, when Blake and Sands came up.

Then Barney told them of Hall's startling threat. Both Blake and Sands were illiterate, though they had thoroughly learned the machinist's trade.

The chief engineer and Billy seemed to be much impressed by Barney's story.

"I should dread to say the air on a haunted ship, and especially when a ghost has sworn to lead it to destruction," said Sands to Blake as they walked away.

"And I, by George! I wouldn't stay long on board the Queen Clipper if Hall was to make his threat good," answered Blake.

"That's my case too. I should be for resigning at once," assented Sands.

"But you know we signed papers with Frank Reade, Jr., for a voyage of such length as he might choose to make, and in the agreements—or shipping papers—it was expressly stated, that no man was to resign or leave the service of the air-ship until she returned to Readstown," said Blake.

"That's so," assented Sands. "And I for one made that agreement in good faith. But, while I'm not afraid of anything living, you may be sure I shall not consider myself bound to go to my doom on a ship led to destruction by an avenging spirit. I should ask Frank Reade, Jr., for my release."

"Just so. I would do the same. But Frank Reade, Jr., might refuse to release us, and insist that we live up to the terms of the agreement."

"In that case there might be trouble. But we won't borrow trouble. Let's wait and see if Hall makes good his threat. I'll speak to Frank Reade and no doubt he will take measures to render an attempt at suicide on Hall's part impossible," said Sands.

"That's a good idea. Frank Reade should certainly be warned of what Hall has threatened," responded Blake.

"Hall and I were good friends. I mean to get permission to talk with him," he added.

Then the two men separated, and Smith Brown, who had overheard their conversation from within the door of the stern cabin, smiled exultantly.

"Ah, ha!" he muttered; "there is trouble brew-

ing for Frank Reade, Jr. My plan to intimidate those of the crew who are not in league with me will succeed. The day of my great triumph will surely come."

Sands lost no time in speaking to Frank about Hall's desperate threat, and the young inventor at once took every precaution to guard against its consummation. Hall's prison-room was searched, and everything with which he could possibly injure himself was removed.

This done, the young inventor felt confident that Hall could not commit suicide. Frank was tender-hearted, and he spoke to Sands and proposed that Hall be forgiven and liberated. But Sands was of revengeful disposition, and he said:

"Since now it is impossible for Hall to commit suicide, I don't think he has yet been punished enough for his cowardly attempt upon my life."

So Frank did not urge the matter more.

Thus far the young inventor had not discovered any obstacle in the way of Van Kempje's railway project to unite the two continents. Neither had the doctor.

One or the other of them had constantly made observations by means of the telescope or the naked eye, and Frank admitted that, as far as he could tell, there was nothing in the way of the wonderful railway scheme that science could not surmount.

The Queen Clipper was sailing over the shore of Behring Sea, when the lookout shouted:

"Whale to the windward!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the doctor, leveling his glass. "Let's have a look at the monster."

"As I live!" he added, a moment subsequently. "It is one of the most formidable cetaceans. A yellow-bellied whale, and fully eighty feet long, I should say."

"We'll harpoon it," cried Frank.

"Take care then how you do it, for the huge creature possesses the power of a steam tug," admonished the doctor.

"All right! We'll use plenty of line and play the monster until we drown him," replied Frank.

Then he gave the essential orders to the engineers, and the Queen Clipper descended to within fifty feet of the water.

Several jets from the spout-holes soon announced the precise location of the great whale.

Frank with one hand signaled the engineers and with the other directed the steersman. He thus controlled the aeronef in every way.

The back of the cetacean emerged from the waves less than four cables' lengths in front of the air-ship. The Queen Clipper swept on until she was sixty feet from the whale and then she stopped.

Then Barney fired a javelin bomb from an arquebus—a metallic cylinder terminated by a shell, armed with a shaft having a barbed point. The projectile, attached to a long line, entered the whale's body. The shell, filled with explosives, burst and shot out a small harpoon with two branches which fastened into the animal's flesh.

The whale plunged to a great depth, and the line spun out like lightning. When the whale rose to the surface he darted at full speed in a northerly direction.

The aeronef was dragged after the monster.

The air-ship was towed along in this remarkable manner until the whale began to tire. Then the stern propeller was started so as to draw against the whale. Gradually the aeronef came nearer the whale. Suddenly the whale dived. The air-ship was dragged to the very surface of the water.

A whirlpool where the animal sank sent up a great wave, and the water dashed over the deck.

For a moment the Queen Clipper was in great peril. But, seizing a hatchet Barney severed the line with a blow.

The Queen Clipper, thus freed, instantly sprang aloft under the impulse of her ascensional screws.

There was no further attempt to capture the whale.

"Begob," said Barney, "instead of ower takin' the whale, the big fish was mighty near takin' us."

"Dat's so," replied Pomp, "an' I done got de big fryin'-pan all ready fo' whale steak, too."

## CHAPTER XXX.

## LOST IN THE ARCTIC FOG—"MAN OVERBOARD!"

NEXT evening the Queen Clipper was caught in a dense Arctic fog. When day dawned the black fog was still impenetrable. On retiring Frank had set the course of the aeronef due north.

All night the course had not been changed.

Owing to the "ice rime"—as these wonderful Arctic fogs which blot out the light of day—are called, it was entirely impossible for the young inventor to locate the position of the air-vessel in the morning.

For once Frank was baffled by the force of a natural phenomenon, which precluded taking the usual observation.

And more than this, so entirely did the fog shut out all view of the surroundings that the air voyagers could not determine with certitude, whether they were sailing over land or water.

It was a singular and perilous situation, and the doctor said to Frank:

"To all intents we are lost. Lost in space. Adrift on the sea of the atmosphere. However, I think we are over a frozen sea or ice-clad land. Anyhow, large bodies of ice must be near, as otherwise the Arctic fog would not prevail thus completely."

"That's true enough, doctor. We may be at this moment much nearer the north pole than we suppose. I see the mercury in the thermometer has frozen, and even our heavy fur coats that we put on when we got in the Arctic zone are scarcely sufficient protection to prevent one's freezing if long exposed on deck," replied Frank.

"And it is summer," said the doctor, significantly.

Frank Reade, Jr., started.

"Doctor, we must indeed be near the north pole. I confess to an oversight. I intended to arise at midnight and order the course changed, but I did not awaken until dawn."

"This matter begins to look serious. In the fog we may at any moment run into a gigantic ice-burg," said the doctor.

"I've thought of that, and the lookout is posted on the bow cabin observatory, and but a few moments since, just before you joined me, I had our speed checked. We are now moving very slowly," rejoined Frank.

"But I mean to have more light on the subject," he added.

"Barney!" then shouted the young inventor.

"Here I am, sur!" responded Barney, coming forward. "Worra, but it's cowl! But Masther Frank, sure where are we? Faith, an' I'm thinkin' we're mighty near nowhere."

"Turn on the electric light," ordered Frank.

Barney hastened to obey.

But the brilliant electric light, which immediately shot its rays through the gloom of the misty canopy environing the Queen Clipper, did not dispel the obscurity. In the direct plane of the electric halo objects could have been discerned if there were any in sight.

But Frank Reade, Jr., and the doctor saw only space. Above and below atmospheric emptiness alone could be discovered.

"Frank," said the doctor, gravely, "how fast did we travel during the night?"

The young inventor consulted the dial indicator for a moment, and then he started violently, as he said:

"As I live, the highest rate of speed has been maintained for hours! We were running fast when I retired. The engineers supposed they were to keep it up at that rate, it seems."

"Good Heaven! That means we have traversed a distance the thought of which alarms me! We have been speeding northward for twelve hours."

"Then we are—where?"

"At the pole, or beyond it," replied the doctor.

Frank Reade paled.

"We have the compass still to guide us. I'll make all speed southward," he said.

Then he consulted the great steering compass.

"The compass, too, has failed us!" he exclaimed in a moment.

It was so. The electric conditions at the poles cause deflections of the needle. The atmosphere must have been charged with electric currents. The needle vibrated uncertainly.

"We are lost indeed!" exclaimed the doctor, and he shuddered as he added:

"The atmosphere of our globe is said to extend but six from the surface in every direction."

"Yes," assented Frank.

"I've thought, what if we should pass beyond that limit?"

"Doctor, you frighten me."

"We should then be out of the orbit of our earth."

"What would then ensue?"

"The laws of gravitation and attraction seem to indicate that we would be drawn into the orbit of another planet."

"But without the atmosphere we should perish when the supply of oxygen artificially generated by my apparatus in the cabin failed, and the air-ship would fall in empty space where there was no atmosphere."

"True, true," assented the doctor.

Frank Reade, Jr., instantly had the course reversed. For hours the fog still hung over the air-ship.

All at once a terrific grinding, crashing sound was heard.

"Icebergs in contact!" shouted Frank.

Immediately he gave the necessary orders, and the Queen Clipper stood still. The crushing, grinding sound gradually subsided, and the doctor said then:



"The icebergs have drifted away from us." Then the aeronef sailed onward. The electric light was still kept burning, and its brilliant reflection only served to illuminate the fog a short distance ahead of the ship.

Frank Reade himself now acted as the lookout. So much depended upon avoiding a collision with an iceberg that the young inventor was unwilling to trust to any one.

The air grew warmer, and of course the rise of temperature assured the aerial voyagers that they were going southward.

The fog was gradually left behind, and the air-ship came in sight of the earth once more. Freed from electrical influences, due to Polar attraction, the compass again fulfilled its functions. The course of the aeronef was continued due south.

The country under the Queen Clipper looked wild and strange. Finally Frank saw extensive forests, and he was pretty sure they were again over the wilds of British America.

A high rate of speed was maintained when the Queen Clipper got out of the fog, and toward nightfall settlements were seen, which gave the assurance that the air-ship was over upper Canada.

The night had fallen when the aeronef passed over the city of Montreal.

Then Zeke Beam and Ben Driggs were standing beside the rail on deck, away from all the others, and as they watched the flickering lights of the city below, they conversed in low and earnest voices.

Presently Smith Brown joined them.

The insane professor was in a state of intense mental excitement.

Speaking rapidly, he told his two confederates the particulars of his plot to frighten Frank Reade, Jr.'s, crew into leaving the Queen Clipper.

"Good!" said Beam, approvingly. "I guess the scheme will work. If we can get rid of a couple only of the men who are true to Reade it will equalize the opposing forces, and help us to win when it comes to make a try to capture the Queen Clipper."

Driggs also approved of Smith Brown's scheme. He asked several questions about it, and finally inquired,

"When are you a-going to begin to work out the scheme?"

"To-night," answered Smith Brown, briefly, and then as he saw Barney coming that way, he walked to the stern engine-room and entered it.

Silence immediately fell between Beam and Driggs.

Barney sauntered away, saying to himself: "Begob, it's mesel' as don't like the looks av this. How mighty sudden thim tellers stopped talkin', an' how quick Smith Brown got away whin he saw me comin'."

Some time later the aeronef was sailing over the St. Lawrence river, and Frank Reade, Jr., was on deck.

All at once he heard a startled cry from Smith Brown, who stood at the door of the stern cabin.

Turning quickly Frank Reade, Jr., saw a dark form falling through the air from the stern part of the deck.

"Man overboard!" shouted Smith Brown.

"Who was it?" cried Frank.

"Steersman Hall!" replied Smith Brown.

Then the sound of a splash in the river came up from the darkness below and then all was still.

#### CHAPTER XXXI.

##### SMITH BROWN DEVELOPS HIS PLOT RELATING TO HALL.

FOR A moment Frank Reade, Jr. was speechless. The sudden announcement made by Smith Brown that Hall had thrown himself overboard was a most startling surprise for the young inventor.

He had felt assured of the steersman's entire safety on board the Queen Clipper, since he had taken the precautions to guard against the prisoner's making way with himself, which have been mentioned.

Frank's first impulse was to save the would-be suicide, if the slightest possibility of so doing yet remained.

Springing to the door of the central cabin, as he to a degree regained his presence of mind, Frank shouted an order to Chief Engineer Sands to check the revolutions of the suspensory helices, and lower the vessel.

Then he signaled the fore and aft engineers to reverse the levers, and stop the advance of the aeronef, so that the descent might be accomplished as nearly as possible at the place where Hall had sunk in the waters of the St. Lawrence.

The orders of the young inventor were obeyed with the usual promptitude, and the propelling screw stopped, while the diminution of the speed of the suspensory screws caused the Queen Clipper to float downward.

At an elevation of a few feet above the water the descent was checked, and the air-ship remained stationary.

The word had passed from one to the other of the crew that Hall had leaped overboard, and there was considerable excitement among the men.

Frank Reade, Jr., vainly scanned the waves searching for Hall, but not a trace of the supposed suicide was to be found upon the darkening water.

However, as he was determined that no effort looking to Hall's rescue should be neglected, Frank had the rubber boat launched, and entering it with Pomp and Barney, he rowed about in different directions.

But it seemed that Steersman Hall had sunk to rise no more. Frank was so convinced, and, therefore, he finally abandoned the search on the water as futile, and rowed back to the Queen Clipper.

"Gollie! I done spee' now Hall's ghost will come back like he said it would, an' make de air-ship go where it will git wrecked for suan," said Pomp, looking very much frightened.

"Begob an' it's mesel' as be's after wishin' this voyage was over wid. Faith, an' I'm afraid av' no livin' mon. But be the powers av turf, I draws the line at ghosts," remarked Barney, who evidently shared Pomp's fears.

"Nonsense!" replied Frank. "There are no such things as ghosts. Take my word for it, we shall not be troubled by anything of the kind."

Pomp and Barney did not argue the question, but for all that, the expressions of their faces told that they were far from convinced.

Having regained the deck of the air-ship again, the young inventor ordered the voyage to be resumed at once.

When the aerial vessel had gained an elevation of several hundred feet, and was once more sailing southward, Frank Reade, Jr., and Dr. Vaneyke went down to the quarters lately occupied by Steersman Hall, in the hold of the vessel.

"It is a mystery to me how Hall escaped from the room in which he was confined, for without help he could not have done so, one would say," said the young inventor.

"I've been thinking about that. You know, Frank, we have never yet solved the mystery of your mysterious foe who is on the ship. We have not yet discovered the owner of the antique bloodstone ring," replied Dr. Vaneyke.

"True. But here we are at the door of Hall's prison-room. Ah, as I live the steersmen must have been released by some member of the crew, for the door has been unlocked, and the bolt on the outside drawn!" exclaimed Frank.

The doctor stepped forward to the open door of the apartment in the hold at which Frank had paused, and he saw that it was really as the young inventor had said.

"Yes. We must conclude that your mysterious enemy has been at work again," assented the doctor.

Frank and the doctor carefully inspected the interior of the prison room in the hold, but they found no clew to the mystery of Steersman Hall's escape.

No suspicion was entertained by either regarding the identity of the man who had set Hall free, and Smith Brown was now as entirely trusted by them as any other member of the crew.

But as the reader is aware, Smith Brown was at the bottom of the mystery. The cunning lunatic was working out his singular scheme against Frank Reade, Jr., with rare skill and finesse.

Some little time before the crazy inventor gave the alarm of "man overboard," as we have seen, he secretly repaired to Hall's prison in the hold.

The crazy professor carried with him a bundle which contained clothing from his own chest. Arriving at the door of Hall's prison, Smith Brown opened it by means of his skeleton key, as on the occasion of his previous clandestine visit.

"Now the time has come to release you and work out the great ruse, looking to the discomfiture of Frank Reade, Jr., and my success, by frightening the crew into deserting the air-ship," said Smith Brown as he entered Hall's presence.

"Good! I am ready to do my part," readily assented Hall.

"Then you will exchange the suit of clothes you are now wearing for the suit of my own which I have brought you. I require your suit for the 'dummy' with which to deceive Frank Reade."

"I understand," responded Hall.

In a few moments he was attired in the clothing Smith Brown had brought him, and the insane professor had Hall's own suit made up in a bundle.

Carrying this, Smith Brown stealthily led the way from the prison-room.

The maniac conducted Hall along the side of the air vessel until they came to a small open space between the bulkhead and the water tank. This part of the hold no one ever had occasion to visit, and there Smith Brown proposed Hall should make

his hiding-place while he assumed the role of "a ghost."

The plotters conversed for a few moments in whispers, after Hall's secret hiding-place was reached. Then Smith Brown gave the steersman a package, which opened proved to be a closely-folded white shroud, with a cowl or head-piece in which holes were cut for the eyes.

This white garment would cover Hall from head to foot, and when robed in it he would present a very ghostly appearance.

Smith Brown had made the shroud secretly while on duty in the stern cabin at night. He had been obliged to sacrifice a number of his own shirts to obtain the material for the ghostly robe, but he did not mind that.

Having given Hall also a small box containing phosphorus, Smith Brown said:

"I will bring you food every night, and as you can help yourself to water from the tank, now all you have to do is to make yourself as comfortable as possible, and keep close here save only when you are prowling about as a 'ghost' to frighten the crew."

With this final remark Smith Brown left Hall, and carrying the steersman's clothing with him he regained his post in the stern engine room unseen.

Having secured the door of the central cabin, Smith Brown quickly stuffed Hall's clothes, thus making an excellent "dummy" to represent the steersman.

Of course it was this "dummy" and not Hall himself who went overboard.

Smith Brown watched for a favorable opportunity, and then, as the aerial vessel was passing over the St. Lawrence, he flung the "dummy" overboard himself.

Smith Brown was very exultant over the success of his ruse. As the voyage of the Queen Clipper was resumed southward, Smith Brown came out on deck. He had observed Sands, Blake and Zeke Beam, all talking earnestly at the door of the central engine house. Coming to the group, he heard Sands say:

"I tell you, boys, I'm skeery. I'm mighty afeared that Hall will keep his word about haunting the air-ship and luring it to its doom."

"So am I," said Blake.

"I reckon," Zeke Beam remarked, "Driggs and I will leave the vessel at the first appearance of a spirit. I ain't quite ready to go to my death yet, an' I take it Driggs hasn't a great hankerin' that way either, bygones!"

"Correct! You don't keep Ben Driggs on this ere ship long when onct he sees a ghost," assented Beam's comrade.

"Any man would be justified in leaving the ship for good if it's haunted; to remain would be foolhardy," said Smith Brown.

And while he and his companions continued to converse in the same strain Pomp and Barney were discussing the same topic.

Alarmed as they were, however, at the prospect of the air-vessel becoming a haunted ship, the two faithful fellows pledged each other that they would stick to the Queen Clipper as long as Frank did.

A southwesterly course was maintained by the air-vessel after the St. Lawrence was left behind some distance, and Frank, some hours later, took an observation and announced that the vessel was on the Red river valley of Dakota.

At sunrise Fargo, Dakota, a town that seems destined to become the metropolis of the far Northwest, was discovered, and as he wished to procure certain provisions, Frank ordered a descent to be made.

#### CHAPTER XXXII.

##### OFF ON A NEW MISSION—THE GHOST OF STEERSMAN HALL.

THE Queen Clipper reached the earth outside of the town of Fargo. The arrival of the aerial wonder caused the usual excitement which always attended a descent of the ship of the air near a large town. But although the citizens of the Dakota metropolis turned out in great numbers to view the aeronef, and do honor to the inventor, Frank slipped away to the city, leaving Doctor Vaneyke to answer all questions, and command the vessel during his absence.

In the town, as he was passing the principal hotel, not a little to his surprise as he was an entire stranger there, some one called out:

"Hello! If that isn't Frank Reade I'm blind as a badger!"

Frank looked up and saw a stalwart young man hastening across the hotel porch toward him.

At the first glance Frank recognized the speaker as an old friend whose name was Steward Bancroft and who was a well known government detective.

In a moment Bancroft was shaking hands with Frank warmly, as he said in true Western style:



"Glad to see you, my boy. Come in and take something."

Frank returned Bancroft's cordial greeting and they entered the hotel. After the officer had seen the young inventor partake of some liquid refreshment, they conversed in an animated way.

Frank wanted to know what Bancroft was doing out there in Dakota, and the officer explained:

"The fact is, I've just concluded a post-office department case, and I'm under orders to proceed at once to 'No Man's Land,' and work against a band of counterfeiters, who are located in 'the neutral strip,' and who have been flooding the South-west with bogus silver coin for some months now."

"You have a dangerous mission before you, I should say," remarked Frank.

"Yes, that's quite true, but I have an unusually powerful motive in taking my life in my hand, as one may say, and venturing among the desperate coiners of No Man's Land."

"How so?"

"Well, you see, the last secret service officer sent to No Man's Land in pursuit of the coiners was my sworn comrade, Barton Kent, poor fellow. Nothing has been heard of him for months, and he must have been murdered by the coiners, or else they have made him a prisoner. My desire to solve the mystery of Barton Kent's late actuates me above other considerations. I want to save if Bart he is a captive, and avenge his death if he has been slain."

"Your hand on that, Bancroft. Why, Bart Kent was my old chum at college, and we were like brothers. I'm with you in this hunt for the coiners," cried Frank impulsively.

"Good! Excellent! Nothing could suit me better. With that wonderful air-ship of yours, of which I have heard, to assist us I am confident we shall succeed," replied Bancroft.

Then he and Frank left the hotel in company. The young inventor made the purchases he had visited the town to procure, and an hour later, with Bancroft on board, the Queen Clipper was speeding southward, and the voyage to No Man's Land was well begun.

The country in question is a strip of public land lying west of Indian territory, north of Texas, east of New Mexico, and south of Kansas. It does not belong to and is not subject to the laws of any of these States or Territories, and is a refuge for evil-doers of them all; hence its name "No Man's Land."

It was overlooked by the Legislators who laid out the surrounding States and Territories. Public sentiment, backed by fire-arms, is the only law. Crude efforts have been made to organize a local government, but little has been accomplished in that line.

Night came on before the Queen Clipper reached "No Man's Land." Toward midnight, when the deck of the aerial craft was deserted, Barney was on duty in the forward cabin, and Pomp came out of the cook's galley to relieve the Irishman.

As Pomp was crossing the deck he suddenly stopped. All at once a tall, white, spirit-like figure became visible at the head of the companion stairs.

The eyes of the apparition glowed like globes of living flame, and it lifted one long white arm, and pointed at the terror-stricken dandy.

Pomp's knees knocked together, his teeth chattered, and his wool stood up straight on the top of his head.

He couldn't utter a sound, and he was powerless to move for a full moment. Then he broke the spell, and yelling at the top of his voice, he ran into the forward cabin and closing the door, placed his

Then he went on to describe the apparition.

"What a fool you are, nagur. Begob, yez dreamed it all," said Barney derisively.

"Does I understand, sah, dat youse mean any pussional 'flection, sah?" demanded Pomp.

"Begob, an' yez may understand that I don't be after callin' yez a liar. But, be the powers av turf, the truth would choke yez."

"See here, Irish. Dat's a pussional insult, sah. I don't 'low no white man to 'sult my wiracity, sah."

"Do yez mane foight? Sure, an' is it a ruetion yez are longin' for?"

"Yes, sah. I've insulted, sah, an' as de insulted party has de right to name de weepings ob wah, I nominate razors at thirty paces."

"Thin, begob, yez will wait many a long day until an Irishman foight like a nagur. Sure, an' if yez will take a sprig av a shtick, I'll get me shil-lalah."

"Git nuffin'. I say I done see de ghost. I stan' on dat statement, sah, flat-footed. Oh, Lord! Hear dat!"

Just then a most unearthly scream rang out on board the Queen Clipper.

Barney threw open the cabin door.

He was just in time to see the apparition, which had frightened Pomp, vanish down the companion way.

The terrible scream had emanated from the supposed "ghost," and the outcry had brought Chief Engineer Sands and Blake on deck in time to see the white robed form as it vanished.

"The saints presarve us. Worra! worra! Be the tail av Biddy Nolan's goat, it is a ghost! True for yez, Pomp, an' it's a colored gentleman, I always said yez were," cried Barney.

Sands and Blake presently rushed to the companion way, but they saw nothing there. Barney and Pomp came out of the forward cabin, and all hands were very much alarmed and excited.

The terrible scream uttered by the apparition penetrated to the cabins occupied by the young inventor, the doctor, and Bancroft the detective. They all came on deck in a moment. Beam and Driggs also appeared there.

The story of the appearance of the apparition was related to Frank by Engineer Sands.

At first Frank was inclined to laugh at the whole affair. But there was so many witnesses of the appearance of the apparition, that he was inclined to the conclusion that the mysterious enemy who was on board, but whom it seemed impossible to detect, was personating a "ghost."

Of course Frank's good sense would not permit him for the moment to admit that there had been an actual spirit appearance on the Queen Clipper.

But the young inventor was none the less troubled, as he observed the strong impression that the supposed "ghost" had made on the crew.

Frank foresaw trouble in the future, arising from the supposition that the Queen Clipper was haunted.

Nothing more was seen of his ghostship that night, and at sunrise Frank took an observation, and then made a calculation, as he would have done if at sea.



The Queen Clipper was over the city of Mexico. It was night and Frank had the electric light turned on, and a diverging halo of brilliant light flashed downward upon the city.

back against it, as though he thought the "ghost" was coming to force an entrance.

"Bad seran til the loikes av yez! Fot's the mather wid the nagur? Begob, is it drunk he is, or crazy I dunno!" exclaimed Barney.

"Fo' de good Lawd's sakes, Barney, it had done come fo' suah," gasped Pomp, between his chattering teeth.

"What's come? Spake what ye mane, ye black-guard. Begob, I've a moind to break the head av yez for comin' to disturb a gentleman wid yer conundrums at this toime o' night," said Barney.

"I done seed de ghost ob Mistah Hall fo' suah!" declared Pomp.



The result gave the latitude and longitude of the Queen Clipper, and then Frank Reade knew that the wild country over which the air vessel was then passing was No Man's Land.

"Now for our crusade against the coiners!" said Frank to Detective Bancroft.

### CHAPTER XXXIII.

#### A DESPERATE BATTLE IN NO MAN'S LAND—IN AN ELECTRIC STORM.

BANCROFT immediately produced a roughly drawn map of No Man's Land.

"This map," said he, "was sent into the secret service department at Washington by Barton Kent with the last report ever received from the poor fellow. You will see it is covered with writing, telling about the trails and passes in the wild country, a large portion of which is unsettled. Here, also, among this range of rocky hills Kent has written the following."

Bancroft paused with his finger on the map to point out the location indicated to Frank who was looking over the map with him.

Then he read what the missing secret service officer had written on the map, as follows:

"One mile due north of the entrance of the pass at which stands a blasted tree, beside a rude deserted log-cabin, will be found the seeming end of this trail. But by lifting the natural canopy of vines across the face of the ledge at which the trail appears to abruptly end, the trail will be found again."

Frank hastened to get out his telescope, and then he and Bancroft carefully inspected the surface of the country as the Queen Clipper cruised about over it.

Presently they sighted a settlement.

"That is Beaver City, the principal town in No Man's Land, and the range of hills we want to find are yonder," said Bancroft, consulting his map, and then pointing in a northern direction.

Frank immediately issued orders to the engineers and the great stern bow and propellers began to revolve more rapidly, and the aerocraft went toward the hills.

"Now," said Frank, "my plan is to locate the counterfeiters' retreat and then sail away and pass out of sight to return under cover of darkness, after any one who may discover the Queen Clipper has time to decide we have gone for good."

Bancroft approved of this plan, and soon after the settlement had been left behind the Queen Clipper was over the hills.

Presently, too, the blasted tree and the log cabin, which were the landmark sought, were seen, and beyond the entrance of a gloomy rock a walled pass was discovered.

Then Bancroft read from the map again, continuing from where he had previously left off, as follows:

"By following the hidden trail from the ledge, one will arrive at a hidden valley in a defile traversed by a stream. There the coiners' headquarters are located."

The Queen Clipper passed over the hills in the direction of the secret trail, and presently a column of smoke was discerned ascending from between two ridges, where the trees almost met across the chasm.

Then the Queen Clipper sailed away, and No Man's Land was soon left behind. That night proved to be rather dark, and under cover of the gloom, the Queen Clipper returned to the hills of the coiners.

A descent was made into the defile from which smoke had been seen arising, and as a point was selected where the trees did not obstruct the way, the Queen Clipper was brought to rest in safety in the well-nigh hidden pass.

There had been no sign to indicate that the aerial vessel had been discovered by the coiners. But such was the fact.

As soon as a landing was made Frank and Bancroft with Pomp and Barney prepared to advance up the defile to find the coiners' rendezvous.

But all at once a score of dark forms emerged from among the rocks and bushes at the sides of the pass, and, discharging a fusillade of rifle-shots and uttering fierce yells, charged upon the air-ship.

The coiners had set an ambush for the Queen Clipper, and it seemed the air-ship had fallen into the trap.

Frank Reade, Jr., and his men were taken completely by surprise, for nothing was more unlooked-for than that sudden advent of the coiners of No Man's Land in force.

The desperadoes charged for the bow of the vessel, and it seemed they were destined to gain a footing on the deck.

Frank shouted to rally his men, and they sprang to arms.

The forward propeller extended several feet beyond the bow of the aerocraft, and at rest the great propeller with its four broad sweeps like those of a wind-mill came within three or four feet of the ground.

"Be the powers av turf!" cried Barney, as the coiners rushed at the great propeller. "Sure an' I'll be ather coolin' off the blackguards av the worruld wid the big fan. Begob, an' it's fannin' thim I'll be doin' av."

Then all at once, as the yelling band of desperadoes surged about the propeller, evidently intent upon climbing by means of it to the deck of the Queen Clipper, Barney rushed into the bow cabin.

Instantly he seized the levers of the forward propelling engine, and depressed them to the last notch, thus turning on a full current of the powerful electricity from the giant battery.

Of course the result was that the great propeller instantly began to revolve at lightning speed, and the way the sweeps knocked the coiners right and left was a sight to behold.

In a trice more than half of the attacking band were knocked out and hurled in every direction.

It was almost as if they had been suddenly caught in a cyclone.

"Whoop! Ireland forever! Come up an' see me, ye murderin' blackguards av the worruld. Come up and put the paws av yez on Frank Reade's little hand-shakin' machine! Sure it's welcome ye are, every mother's son av yez!" yelled Barney.

He was delighted, and the way he danced about and shouted was enough to convince one who did not know him, that he had taken leave of his senses.

The coiners who escaped the propeller fell back, and this retreat gave Frank time to rally his men. In a moment all was ready for battle,

and a return volley of bullets was discharged at the enemy.

But the coiners of No Man's Land were a most determined and desperate band. They charged again, and several of them succeeded in gaining the deck.

Then a terrible hand to hand fight ensued.

Barney and Pomp now found themselves in their element.

"Whoop!" yelled the Irishman, springing into the midst of the enemy, and wielding his empty rifle as a shillalah! "Whoop! Begob this is a ruction worth travelling a hundred miles to take a hand in!"

Barney brained a huge-bearded ruffian, who was rushing at Frank with his bowie-knife raised, and knocked down two others the succeeding instant.

Just then, as the combat raged fast and furious, Frank saw that a coiner had hurled Dr. Vaneyke upon the deck floor and was grasping the old scientist's throat and strangling him, while he tried to reach a knife which he had dropped.

Frank started forward to the rescue. But just then Pomp shot by the young inventor head down, and the next moment he had butted the murderous coiner who held the doctor.

The desperado turned a half somersault, and then remained motionless.

"Gollie!" cried Pomp. "I spees dat white trash done think dat a cannon ball hit him."

The fight was continued for but a few moments. Then the coiners were driven from the air-ship. But all who had boarded the Queen Clipper did not leave it. A number had been slain.

Just as the last surviving coiner leaped from the deck, a man who dragged several feet of heavy chain at one his ankles, was discovered running down the defile.

"Barton Kent! And alive!" shouted Bancroft, recognizing the fugitive as the missing detective.

The coiners had retreated down the pass and in a moment Barton Kent reached the Queen Clipper and was taken on board. At once the aerial craft was made to ascend, and in a short time it was at a considerable distance from the coiners' rendezvous. Kent told that he had been held a captive by the coiners all the time he had been missing. The Queen Clipper conveyed the two detectives to Denver and there left them.

Kent had further explained that he had escaped from a cave where he was chained while the battle with the coiners was in progress.

Then the aerial craft went southward.

Doctor Vaneyke expressed a desire to visit the city of Mexico, and in a short time, as a high rate of speed was maintained, the Queen Clipper was over the city of Mexico. It was night and Frank had the electric light turned on, and a diverging halo of brilliant light flashed downward upon the city.

The following day a storm came up as the Queen Clipper was sailing northward. The atmosphere was charged with electricity, to a degree seldom attained. The Queen Clipper was a thousand feet above the earth when all at once a deafening clap of thunder rolled around it, and the air-ship began to sink.

"Put on more speed!" Frank cried to the engineer of the suspensory helices.

"Impossible! The current from the battery has broken," replied Sands. His face was white as death as he made the thrilling announcement.

The continuation and conclusion of this story will be found in No. 45 of the Frank Reade Library, entitled "Frank Reade, Jr., and His Queen Clipper of the Clouds." Part II.

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